JUNE 26, 2000

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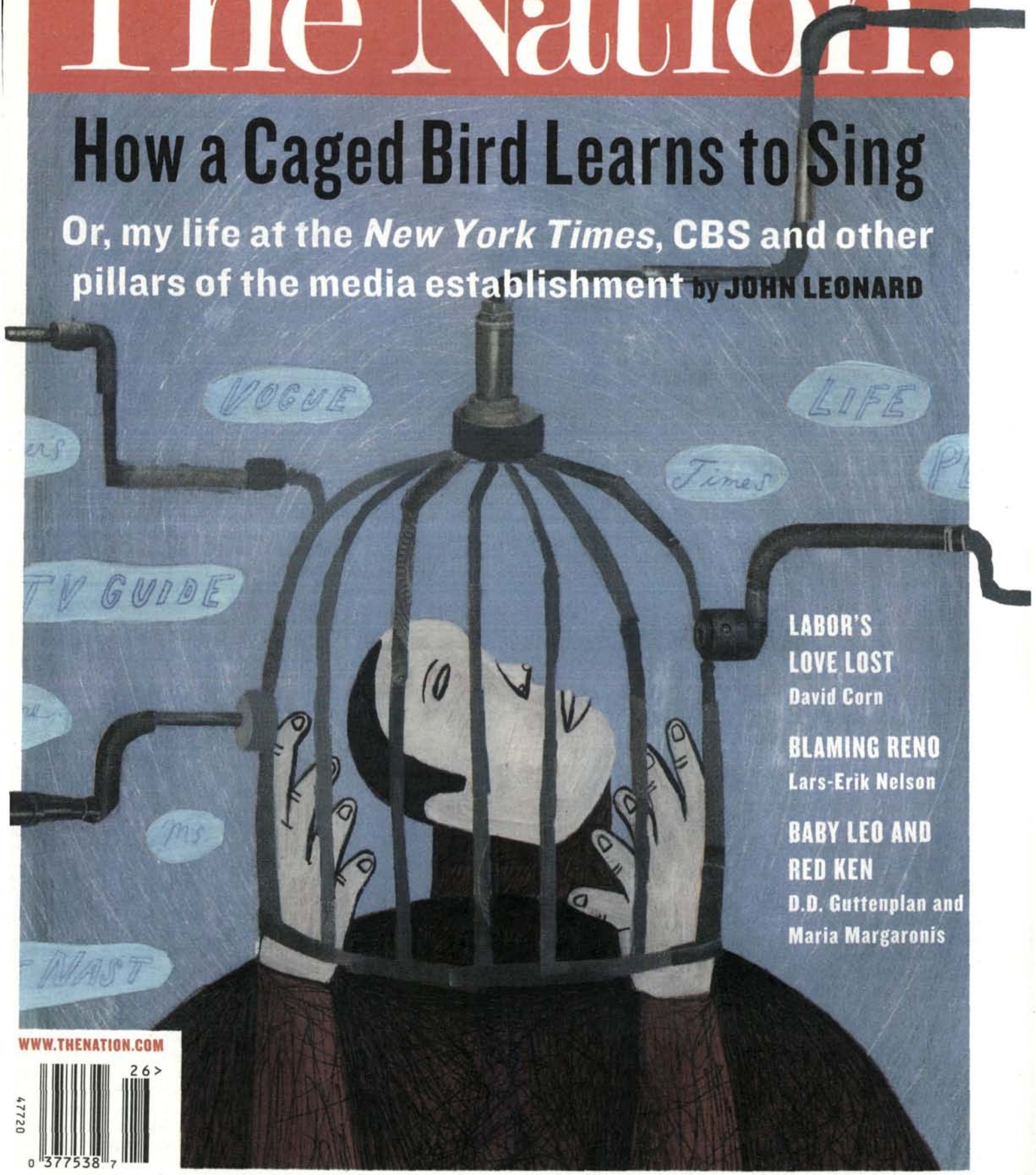
# The Nation.

## How a Caged Bird Learns to Sing

Or, my life at the *New York Times*, CBS and other pillars of the media establishment by JOHN LEONARD

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EXCHANGE

# Pacifica: The Last Word

*"Biased" was the term used most often in the scores of letters sent in response to John Dinges's "What's Going on at Pacifica?" [May 1]. Pacifica listeners found it "disappointing," "clueless," "pathetic," "insulting," "inaccurate" "profit-driven drivel" that was a "hit piece" "traveling the road of* The New Republic. *" We were called "corporate mouthpiece," and subscriptions were canceled. On the other hand, some thought the piece "balanced," and we were thanked for our "efforts over the last year to tap a variety of perspectives regarding the difficult crisis at Pacifica radio." A sampling follows.*

*Berkeley, Calif.*

■ John Dinges's article on Pacifica is a refreshing look at a conflict of which regular listeners to KPFA are all too wearily aware. Dinges supplies believable and positive motives for Pacifica management, more plausible than the paranoid (but, alas, believable) accounts of evil motives that have been our regular fare. If his astonishing point that the three stations that embraced the programming reforms have "seen their combined audiences increase by 52 percent" is true, then clearly KPFA and WBAI local leadership should move beyond recrimination and reconsider their opposition to changes.

Dinges correctly suggests that the stations' goal must be to appeal to a mass, not a select audience. Much as I love many KPFA programs, I mustn't be the only one listening. If the "patchwork quilt of programs" doesn't work, if programs can't attract an audience, we have a responsibility to consider fundamental changes. We must bring KPFA's message (founder Lew Hill's goal of "a lasting understanding between individuals of all nations, races, creeds and colors" remains moving and precise) to a broad public and a new generation. DAVID KESSLER

*San Francisco*

■ John Dinges's article probably came across as reasonable to readers who haven't been closely following what's going on at Pacifica. Of course we can all agree that alternative media outlets should be reaching larger audiences. And how about more diverse audiences while we're at it?

But the Pacifica struggle is not about audience growth. It's about a corporate-style takeover of a progressive institution. If you look at what the Pacifica board has done over the past year, you will see a pattern of consolidation of power in the hands of the board and away from the subscribers and staff; elimination by censorship or firing of critics of management policies; stacking of the board and staff with people who have clear corporate affiliations and no ties to progressive communities; and attacks on progressive national programs like *Democracy Now!* that too effectively challenge the status quo.

My experience with most of the board members is that they have nothing but contempt for the current audiences, and they haven't a clue about developing programming that would draw new people into the fold. The success stories they hold up, like WPFW, are stations that have hardly any political programming and no local news. WPFW did little or no local coverage of the demonstrations against the World Bank and IMF. And KPFT, the Houston station, carries more programming from NPR and the BBC than from Pacifica.

We need to get this progressive media institution out of the hands of the board members. Then, and only then, let's have a talk about audience. Let's have a big talk with everyone in the left press about why so few people are listening to our radio stations and reading our publications. Maybe in the past we could use the excuse that there weren't that many progressives around anymore, but that argument just doesn't hold up now. There's a new movement out there, folks, and the progressive media need to hook up with it real fast. The folks who are organizing against police brutality, the prison-industrial complex and the death penalty are well organized. They are young people, people of color and immigrants. The antiglobalization folks who raised hell in Seattle and DC are showing a generation of people that protest is not irrelevant!

Then we might try to go beyond the "bigger audience is better" paradigm to consider a new one. How about "media that build and nourish the movement are better"? Step one in building and nourishing the movement is being in touch with it. *The Nation*'s understanding the media and democracy movement would be a giant step.

ANDREA BUFFA, *Media Alliance*

*New York City*

■ Had John Dinges interviewed longtime Pacifica journalists Amy Goodman, Verna Avery-Brown, Dan Coughlin, Laura Flanders, Dennis Bernstein and Cheryl Flowers or dissenting board members like Tomas Moran, he could not have dismissed critics of Pacifica's new leaders as people who prefer a small, insulated audience.

All of the above have worked hard to increase Pacifica's listenership without watering down its content. All are supporters of national programming and are responsible for much of Pacifica's best recent work. By failing to interview nearly all of the most prominent critics of Pacifica's current management while favoring management defenders and their arguments, Dinges failed to make good on *The Nation*'s promise of a "full-blown examination" of the Pacifica struggles.

Knowledgeable critics might have pointed out, in answer to Dinges's pro-management editorializing on Arbitron ratings, that all five Pacifica stations have gained listeners in the past five years. The two stations that have "improved" the most—Houston's KPFT and Washington's WPFW—have done so largely by sacrificing Pacifica's mission and public affairs shows in favor of music and other ratings-grabbing programming. How could Dinges write a lengthy article on Pacifica without including an opinion held by many thoughtful critics—that KPFT and WPFW are becoming almost unrecognizable as Pacifica stations?

Finally, had Dinges called FAIR before describing our weekly radio show *CounterSpin* as "one-sidedly anti–Pacifica board," he would have learned that, of more than 400 broadcasts, only four have ever mentioned Pacifica management issues. In the first show, we included a defender of Pacifica management; in three subsequent shows, Pacifica leadership declined our invitations to participate. Ironically, while our media criticism show has been repeatedly censored on the new Pacifica, *CounterSpin* has never been censored by any of our NPR affiliates despite dozens of programs that included criticism of NPR. STEVE RENDALL

*FAIR (Fairness & Accuracy In Reporting)*

*New Rochelle, N.Y.*

■ I was a producer at WBAI in the early seventies—Pacifica's "glory days," which were due to its relationship with a vibrant national progressive movement. Pacifica nourished this movement and was nourished by it. When the movement shrank and split in later years, Pacifica inevitably did too. If Pacifica remains true to its principles, its fortunes will always reflect those of the movement it represents. In 1972 I opposed Pacifica's acceptance of funds from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and was derided as a "purist." I take little satisfaction in noting that the antidemocratic changes in Pacifica's national structure that precipitated the current crisis were forced by the network's dependence on those very funds.

By compromising its mission, accepting more tainted funds and sacrificing content for style, Pacifica could certainly grow in size in the short term, but it would shrink in importance and usefulness. A "stronger" Pacifica would be of little value if the network ceased to represent the cutting edge of progressive thought, however out of fashion or difficult for some to hear. In these

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# EDITORIALS

## *Death Penalty Hypocrisy*

One measure of the shifting politics of crime: the distance to Ricky Nolen McGinn from Rickey Ray Rector. In 1992 candidate Bill Clinton, seeking to make clear his law-and-order credentials, interrupted his campaign to officiate over the killing of the mentally retarded Rector. This year George W. Bush, sensing rising public anxiety over false capital convictions, interrupted not his campaign but his unbroken record of executions to approve a reprieve for McGinn, allowing time for DNA testing that might, or might not, clear him of sexually assaulting and murdering his stepdaughter. It's impossible not to view this unprecedented reprieve with relief—or to ignore the cynicism of Bush's newfound concern for due process after presiding over 131 executions since he took office. (Nor should we overlook the cynicism behind Al Gore's expedient support for the death penalty to avoid seeming soft on crime.)

Although Bush tried to claim credit for McGinn's reprieve, buying time for him was the initiative of Texas Senate president Rodney Ellis, a Democrat who governs the state in Bush's absence. Bush leaped on the DNA evidence bandwagon, talking piously of insuring McGinn's day in court when he knows full well that the Texas justice system in which he has expressed confidence routinely rejects new-evidence claims.

A far more representative example of Texas justice occurred recently in an appeals court hearing in the case of Calvin Burdine, one of several death-row defendants whose court-appointed lawyers slept during clients' trials (see Bruce Shapiro, "Sleeping Lawyer Syndrome," April 7, 1997). State prosecutors maintained that a sleeping lawyer is no different from one who's drunk, psychotic or afflicted with Alzheimer's, none of which warrants reversal of a guilty verdict in a Texas murder trial.

Bush gets it both ways with the McGinn reprieve: "compassionate conservative" for a month of DNA testing, law-and-order man for the execution of McGinn, which may yet follow. Beyond the candidate's cynicism, however, this reprieve should warn death penalty opponents of how swiftly the momentum of actual-innocence cases may be co-opted. The proponents and political beneficiaries of capital punishment are willing to concede the need for more precise scientific evidence to head off the growing anti–death penalty sentiment, as manifested in a recent Gallup poll showing support has fallen from 80 percent in 1994 to 66 percent. The Governor of Illinois declared a moratorium on executions after thirteen men were exonerated by new evidence, and three other states are reviewing their administration of the death penalty. In May the New Hampshire Legislature voted to abolish the death penalty altogether (although the Governor vetoed the bill).

McGinn's reprieve makes clearer the wisdom of Senator Patrick Leahy's Innocence Protection Act, which would fund DNA evidence appeals and overall capital defense, and of Senator Russ Feingold's bill calling for a death penalty moratorium while it is studied by a commission. (To protest upcoming executions see "Death Row Roll Call" at www.thenation.com.)

But whatever new safeguards may be approved, the criminal justice system must be weaned from capital punishment. Its cruelty and inequity could not be erased by the best DNA laboratory and the best lawyers on earth.

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COMMENT


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# *Labor's Love Lost*

After the House passed President Clinton's China trade bill, Richard Trumka, AFL-CIO secretary-treasurer, issued a threat: "The 163 Republicans and 73 Democrats that voted for China trade yesterday are going to pay a price." At the same time, AFL-CIO president John Sweeney declared that the threat did not extend to one prominent supporter of the legislation, Al Gore: "The Vice President is not the President, and this was clearly the President's bill." Sweeney attacked the "Clinton-DeLay" forces that fought for the measure and left Gore out of the picture. Talk about mixed signals. Organized labor is going to impose payback on Democratic lawmakers, but not on Gore?

Actually, it's unlikely that the AFL-CIO will punish the errant Democrats—especially when the union hopes to help them regain control of the House. In labor circles there is anger at these Democratic legislators, particularly Charlie Rangel (who derided labor's lobbying campaign against the bill) and Sander Levin (whose proposal for a human rights commission on China was instrumental in the bill's passage) as well as Tom Sawyer, Lois Capps, Dennis Moore and Diana DeGette (who voted for it despite union assistance to their campaigns). But at a meeting of union political directors, several wanted to put off a confrontation until after the election. And since the AFL-CIO endorsed Gore last year, it's hardly in a position to dump him now for being a loyal member of an Administration that kicked the unions in the teeth. So for some labor politicos, on the matter of the China vote, it's time to move on. In a two-party system, where choices are limited, such compromises often seem unavoidable.

But frustration is brewing. The most notable eruption was the May 23 statement of United Auto Workers president Stephen Yokich, in which he blasted Clinton *and* Gore. "One moment," he fumed, "presidential candidate Gore is telling the labor movement that he believes human rights, workers' rights and environmental protections should be included in core trade agreements; the next, Vice President Gore is holding hands with the profiteers of the world and singing the praises" of the China deal. So it's time to look beyond the two major parties, said Yokich. He raised the possibility of supporting Ralph Nader, "who will take a stand based on what is right, not what big money dictates." Yokich's declaration sent tremors across the Democratic-labor landscape. The Gore campaign, which knew in advance that the statement was coming, asked House Democratic leader Dick Gephardt and Democratic whip David Bonior to keep Yokich from sounding off. Yokich ignored their importunings.

It's hard to envision the UAW—which, like the Teamsters, abstained from the AFL-CIO endorsement of Gore—backing Nader, a Green with whom they disagree on issues like global warming and fuel-efficiency standards. But Yokich went further than most labor leaders by publicly airing his frustration with the political duopoly. The Teamsters' James Hoffa followed suit a week later, saying his union may not endorse any presidential candidate. Hoffa announced that his executive board would talk with Ralph Nader and George W. Bush. Hoffa has also met with Pat Buchanan. His union did yank its endorsement of Capps and Moore.

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COMMENT

"Are we labor leaders or Democrats first?" asks Chuck Harpel, the Teamsters' political director. "If we keep throwing money at the Democratic Party and are constantly disappointed on the big vote, we might as well fold. Is Nader the answer? I don't know. But our members want to look at people other than Gore. They're saying to us, We can't trust the corporate world, and we can't trust the Democratic Party."

Although most of labor will stick with Gore and the Democrats (after all, a majority of the Democrats opposed the China bill), labor leaders know that the China deal has made selling Democrats tougher. "There will be less enthusiasm for Democrats among our members, and it will be much more difficult to motivate them," says a senior union official. The AFL-CIO has vowed to conduct the largest get-out-the-vote drive in its history. But after Sweeney turned the China bill into a life-or-death struggle and pumped up his members about it, revving them up again for Gore won't be easy (and Gore may well need every labor vote possible to win in such industrial swing states as Michigan, Illinois, Ohio and Pennsylvania). Labor voters' enthusiasm for Gore and the Democrats may also be affected by Gore's choice of running mate. (Energy Secretary Bill Richardson, for example, has never been a union favorite.) Officials at the Teamsters and the UAW say that both unions might still end up backing Gore. But Yokich's statement, one UAW official remarks, "reflects what our activists feel. They are the ones expected to pound on doors. They have to have a belief that the guy they're working for will come through for them on big issues. There is substantial disillusionment."

In a two-horse system, you're often forced to ride the one that will buck you the least. A few labor leaders are looking for (or flirting with) a better mount. "None of us really know where Yokich and Hoffa will, or can, go," says a top official at another union. "I can see them saying, 'Fuck 'em all' and telling members to sit it out—and we end up with Bush. We're really stuck. Everyone knew we would be, and we are." DAVID CORN

# *Southern Lebanon Waits*

*Kefer Kila, Southern Lebanon*

The final confrontation between Hezbollah and Israeli troops will stand alongside Anwar Sadat's 1977 arrival in Jerusalem and the extraordinary handshake (fatal for Yitzhak Rabin and perhaps for Yasir Arafat too) on the White House lawn in 1993. In southern Lebanon in May, after all the years of bestializing every Islamic enemy as a "mindless terrorist," Israelis found the bearded, armed members of the Party of God on their frontier. Right up against the border fence. Standing next to the gunmen, I was amazed to see how awed they were by their own victory. One of the world's smallest guerrilla forces had driven one of the world's most powerful armies out of an entire country. The Hezbollah, it seemed to me, were as amazed at history's power as the Israelis. I asked one of them—a red-faced, bearded man with an M-16—what he was thinking as he looked over at the Jewish settlement of Mishgav Am. "Incredible," he said.

And he was right. Inevitably, US and Israeli journalists recalled the fall of Saigon and the collapse of the South Vietnamese Army. In just two days, Israel's Lebanese surrogates, the ragtag South Lebanon Army, had fallen to pieces. But the parallel was preposterous. In South Vietnam the national army fought on alone for years with, in its initial stages, high morale. But Israel's SLA militia fought for money—$400 a month, often paid in fake $100 bills. And they fought because they were blackmailed into service—brothers and sisters would be jailed in the notorious Israeli torture prison at Khiam if their siblings did not enlist. And they fought because they had collaborated with Israel in the past and had no other future in Lebanon.

Once the Israelis decided to leave, the SLA's disintegration was inevitable. It never had a cause to fight for. The SLA was not, as a general once boasted, the "shield of Galilee." Nor was Israel's so-called security zone secure. It was a myth. The SLA fell apart like a gang of mercenaries in central Africa. Comparisons with Vietnam are as dangerous as they are childish. The bearded images staring through the frontier wire were, alas for the Israelis, the authentic face of southern Lebanon. Many belonged to young Hezbollah men displaced from their homes in the south during Israel's military adventures in Lebanon in 1978 and 1982. Hundreds of them were embracing family members for the first time in more than a decade.

And right now, it seems, the Lebanese government is in no mood to send its entire army into the south of the country—nor to sanction a massive UN deployment. There are several reasons for this. The government in Beirut sees no reason its soldiers should act as a sandbag for the Israelis. It is not the Lebanese Army's job to protect Israel's northern border. Nor is it the United Nations'. Had Israel abided by UN Resolution 425 when it was passed twenty-two years ago, things might have been different.

And then there is Golan. All along, Syria has insisted that the "peace process" among Syria, Lebanon and Israel should be "two-track." Even the Americans went along with that. An Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon, the Syrians said, must be matched by a withdrawal from the Syrian Golan Heights. And Syria's pressure point for such a joint retreat was in southern Lebanon: Bleed the Israelis in their Crusader-style forts east of the Mediterranean, and they would have to concede Golan as well as southern Lebanon.

That was President Hafez al-Assad's equation. Golan remained quiet, the 1973 battle lines frozen. The Syrians could regard southern Lebanon's battle as theirs—with the advantage that it was the Lebanese rather than the Syrians who suffered on the Arab side. Now the Israelis have left. Golan—glimmering gray with dirty white streaks of snow to the east of Lebanon—seems as isolated politically as it is geographically. Why should the Israelis leave Golan now that they have left Lebanon? No one is shooting at the Israeli soldiers on Golan.

Already, a member of the Syrian Parliament has suggested that "resistance" should begin on Golan. But this is a canard. Syria is not going to provoke Israeli attacks on Damascus. Nor is Hezbollah going to liberate Jerusalem. When its leader, Hassan Nasrallah, urged the Palestinians to follow Hezbollah's example and take their destiny in their own hands, he was telling the Palestinians that they cannot expect Hezbollah's help.

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COMMENT

Much more disturbing are the fears of the southern Lebanese themselves—and of the Hezbollah who live there. There are rumors of disturbances to come: Lebanese troops now maintain checkpoints on every road north, searching for shells, explosives, guns. Hezbollah officials admitted to me recently that they are deeply concerned that "provocations" might be attempted in the newly liberated territories. It's not difficult to see, for example, how a car bomb in a southern Lebanese city like Nabatiyah could be presented as the work of "Israeli agents" and provoke a response from the Hezbollah or from less disciplined militias. It's easy to see how some small Palestinian group—perhaps linked to Damascus—could initiate a lone cross-border raid, however suicidal, that would provoke an Israeli attack.

Even now, the Lebanese authorities, who remain host to 21,000 Syrian soldiers, are bickering over the exact border between Lebanon and Israel. What about the Shabaa Farms, they are asking, the small tract of land taken by Israel during its 1967 offensive against Syria? Why hasn't Israel withdrawn from them too? The UN will have none of this. If the farms are Lebanese territory, it says, the Lebanese-Syrian border was too poorly defined to prove it. Yet the dispute over a few square acres of arable land could delay Lebanon's decision to deploy UN troops in the south.

And we all know why. Southern Lebanon may be liberated, but it is not safe. And it may still provide a battleground for other people's wars. The Hezbollah would like to consolidate their victory as a platform for autumn's parliamentary elections. They would like to represent the Shiites of Lebanon. The Lebanese civilians would like to enjoy their liberty. But as long as the Israelis stay on Golan, the Syrians will see no advantage in giving Israel an easy life behind the border with Lebanon. Damascus has said that it supports the UN there but added that it was "not responsible" for any events that followed liberation. As a UN officer commented cynically, "After hearing that, do they think I want to send my soldiers to southern Lebanon?" ROBERT FISK

*Robert Fisk, Middle East correspondent for the London* Independent, *has lived in Beirut since 1976.*

CALVIN TRILLIN

## A Rise in Unemployment Arrives on Schedule

You cannot find a job? No cash is flowing?
You haven't paid your bills, which have been growing?
You'll never get the money you've been owing?
Be happy: The economy is slowing.

The strategy is working fine.
It's not a time for you to whine.

You're running out of things that you can sell?
Your health insurance just ran out as well?
Your life is an unmitigated hell?
Be happy, for the Dow's responding well.

So try to take the macro view.
It's not about just little you.

# *Abortion's Guerrilla War*

Antiabortion activism used to be pretty simple: Hold up a sign in front of an abortion clinic, participate in the occasional clinic "rescue" and chain yourself to your comrades inside a facility. But in May 1994 President Clinton signed into law the Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances Act, which threatened civil penalties and prosecutions for blocking clinic access. At just about the same time, Life Dynamics Inc., the Texas-based brainchild of Mark Crutcher, was born.

Crutcher's first big hit came in 1992, with the release of *Firestorm: A Guerrilla Strategy for a Pro-Life America*, a manifesto of sorts with an explicit mission to "insult, ridicule, belittle and malign abortionists in every way possible." Life Dynamics is billed as "America's most innovative pro-life organization," and the group's main tactic has been to encourage women to file malpractice lawsuits against already terrorized abortion providers—a clever strategy, given the current crisis of access to abortion services. Crutcher has been called an impressive, creative and gifted teacher by leaders of the antiabortion movement—including Charles Wysong of the American Rights Coalition, another group that specializes in referring women who've had an abortion to lawyers who will sue the doctor.

But it was another innovative maneuver that recently catapulted Life Dynamics into the spotlight: the "discovery" of alleged trafficking in fetal body parts. Federal law bans making a profit from the sale of human tissue, but Crutcher and his cohorts maintain that employees in abortion clinics across the country have conspired to "harvest" and then sell tissue from fetuses to the highest bidder.

Want proof? Life Dynamics will gladly mail you a thick pamphlet for $8, replete with order forms supposedly received by a Planned Parenthood clinic (Planned Parenthood officials call these materials a "total misrepresentation of reality"). "Parts" said to be requested by pharmaceutical companies and universities include prenatal eyes, livers, lungs, brains and kidneys. "When an order calls for parts to be retrieved within 10 minutes of the baby's death, this is one of those instances where a live birth is highly likely," the pamphlet cautions. "When you see a form that stipulates…'no anomalies'…this is irrefutable proof that these late-term abortions are being done on perfectly healthy babies," it continues.

Life Dynamics frequently tries to link the use of fetal tissue for medical research to "partial birth" abortion. In an August 1999 interview with the *Alberta Report*, an online Canadian newsmagazine, Crutcher said he was convinced that the research demand for "intact late-term fetal organs" was the hidden truth behind the "partial birth" abortion controversy. "Why do pro-

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COMMENT

aborts fight so hard to keep it?" he asked, referring to late-term-abortion bans overturned by the courts. "This is about maximizing profits. First you sell the woman an abortion. Then you turn around and sell the dead baby you take out of her. But you have to take it out whole or you don't have anything to sell."

Given statements like that, you'd think most major media outlets would be skeptical of the trafficking claims. But Life Dynamics conned its way into a remarkably favorable *20/20* spot in March and then top billing at a Congressional hearing the following day. What the group hoped would be a huge coup in the abortion wars, however, quickly turned into a debacle on Capitol Hill. When Dean Alberty, Life Dynamics' key witness, took the stand, he recanted most of his testimony, explaining that he had only told the group what they wanted to hear in exchange for money. In addition, the shadowy figure featured in an infamous and widely circulated video known as "the Kelly tape," who says she is afraid for her life after witnessing a doctor drown aborted twins in a steel pan (a detail that turned up in Alberty's Congressional testimony), is now thought to be Crutcher's wife.

Despite the glitches, anti-choicers seem to be standing by Life Dynamics. "I don't think their credibility has been gainsaid," said Texas Right to Life's Jim Graham. "Despite what happened with Alberty, it in no way contradicts the factual evidence they had. The hearing was simply not well orchestrated."

The group's tactics have begun to pay off. Within days of the *20/20* segment, lawmakers in several states introduced legislation restricting the use of fetal tissue. The measures range from requiring detailed registries in Missouri and Kansas to an outright ban on the practice in Nebraska and Colorado. The Nebraska bill was pulled on March 28 in the face of a filibuster, but proponents vow they'll be back next year.

The irony is that even if lawmakers enact additional fetal-tissue laws, they will have little or no effect on abortion services. Instead, according to Planned Parenthood president Gloria Feldt, the measures will affect people who suffer from debilitating diseases like Alzheimer's and Parkinson's, who look to medical research that uses donated fetal tissue.

Denver resident Carolyn Nelson hopes she won't see a ban pass in her state. Her 63-year-old husband, Don, was diagnosed with Parkinson's nearly thirty years ago and received the first fetal-cell transplant in North America in 1988. He went from crawling on his hands and knees to being able to walk again. "I can't say that I'm either for or against abortion, but since abortion is legal, that tissue should be used to help mankind," says Nelson. "I would much rather have those cells in my husband's head than in a trash can somewhere." MARY GUIDEN

*Mary Guiden is a Denver-based writer.*

# *In Fact...*

### THE PHILLY TEN

Last July 3, ninety-five demonstrators at the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia protesting the death sentence of Mumia Abu-Jamal were arrested. Ten of the demonstrators decided to plead not guilty—they were nonviolent and exercising free speech, and some hadn't even been ordered to move. In April they were tried in federal court. While the rest went their way, the ten received a $250 fine *and* one-year's probation—a severe sanction indeed for what was basically a littering summons from a park ranger. One of those sentenced, Frances Goldin of New York City, is Mumia's literary agent. The terms of her parole bar her from leaving her federal court district or associating with "any person convicted of a felony." When she duly informed her parole officer that she wanted to make her regular visit to Mumia to talk over his literary and financial affairs, he told her he would have to "check with Philadelphia." Clark Kissinger of Refuse and Resist, which has been leading the Free Mumia campaign, was recently ordered by *his* parole officer to turn over financial records. Then FBI agents subpoenaed his wife for all *her* records, ostensibly in connection with an unrelated fraud case at a lab where she once worked. Kissinger believes that the punitive parole, with these and other onerous restrictions on travel, was really imposed "because the movement to free Mumia has gained such prominence, and the government is trying to ground us." It certainly sets a dangerous precedent for punishing peaceful dissenters with an unpopular cause.

### REVOLT OF THE CLERKS

Joe Uris writes: Publishers and sellers at BookExpo America in Chicago (June 2–4) were startled by leaflets from the ILWU (International Longshore and Warehouse Union) accusing nationally known Portland book dealer Michael Powell of unfair labor practices. Powell's struggle is part of a wave of unionization in white-collar industries that rely on bright, educated, low-wage young people. The ILWU organizing drive at Powell's came about after a late-nineties reorganization at the store disempowered many Powell's workers who managed separate departments. With raises restricted, autonomy lost, bonuses discontinued and Powell's expanding online and at home, unionization followed. Powell, otherwise a liberal, insists that a union shop would ignore antiunion workers. The ILWU accuses him of stalling negotiations to force a decertification election. As the book industry evolves into national chains and online dealers, independents watch with dismay as Powell's, their role model, goes for an increasingly rationalized and competitive marketplace, and worker morale plummets.

### E-MAIL CALL

New York's Working Families Party has been pushing for an increase in the state's minimum wage from $5.15 to $6.75 an hour, indexed for inflation. Now the bill has gained surprising support in the legislature among most Democrats and some Republicans, and the WFP says it has a fighting chance of passage. New Yorkers: Call or e-mail Governor Pataki, your state senator and senate majority leader Joe Bruno demanding that the measure be passed.

### NEWS OF THE WEAK IN REVIEW

Jane Spencer writes: Corporate America and the Democrats are swapping more than soft money and political favors. Pepsi executives met recently with Democratic leaders to exchange ideas on developing "brand loyalty" among the younger set. DNC national chairman Joe Andrew says that Pepsi came knocking at his door after watching the Dems rise in popularity with younger voters. (Recent polls show Gore is the favorite flavor among 18-to-24-year-olds.) "The Democratic Party is a great brand and the party has been able to expand the brand dramatically with the younger demographic," says Andrew. "Corporate America wants to know how to do it." Maybe we can expect a joint venture marketing Gore Cola.

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# THE BEAT BY JOHN NICHOLS

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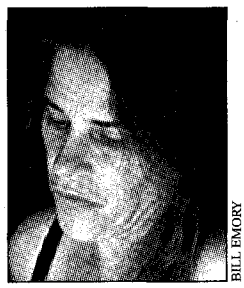
**ELECTION BEAT** California State Senator **Hilda Solis** has become the first woman to receive a **John Fitzgerald Kennedy Profile in Courage Award** from the JFK Library and Museum. Senator **Ted Kennedy** and **Caroline Kennedy-Schlossberg** hailed Solis for battling environmental racism by winning passage of a California law that guarantees "fair treatment of people of all races, cultures and incomes with respect to the development, adoption, implementation and enforcement of environmental laws." Solis stood up to a Republican governor and business opposition to end haphazard enforcement of environmental laws in low-income neighborhoods. She pledges a similar fight at the federal level if elected to Congress. In March the labor-backed progressive knocked off Representative Matt Martinez in the Democratic primary.... Virginia Democrats wore "I'd rather fight than switch" stickers and nominated **National Black Farmers Association** founder **John Boyd** to challenge Representative Virgil Goode Jr., a former Democrat who now caucuses with Republicans. Boyd led the drive to stop Department of Agriculture discrimination against black farmers.... A week after Minnesota State Senator **Jerry Janezich** returned from last fall's anti-WTO protests in Seattle, he jumped into the nine-way race for the Democratic Farmer Labor Party's nod to challenge vulnerable Republican US Senator Rod Grams. In early June he won the DFL endorsement. Says Janezich: "The key question faced in Seattle, I believe, will also be the key question of this century's first decade: Who will decide our future? Global corporations, or you and I—the voters in a democratic society?"

**THE BEHOLDER'S EYE** Virginia photographer **Sally Mann** has earned a national reputation for intimate portraits of her three children. In May a lecture and slide show by Mann drew an enthusiastic crowd to the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. But after receiving an anonymous letter complaining about Mann's nude images, conservative Republican Governor Jim Gilmore condemned the photographer's work—without seeing it—as "outrageous displays that push the envelope of decency and challenge the values of our society." Gilmore ordered the state-owned museum to initiate policies that "uphold community standards of decency in all your endeavors." Museum officials responded that they were weighing policy changes, including "warnings" to alert skittish visitors. The **Virginia Civil Liberties Union** is pushing the museum to resist self-censorship. **Kent Willis** of the ACLU had this message for the museum: "I hope we can get a place at the table to say: If you're going to address this issue, don't handcuff yourselves. If you capitulate on this you'll have to capitulate every time a governor whines." Sally Mann says she's sorry for a governor whose imagination "must have run wild conjuring up the visual horrors" described in the letter; and sorrier still "for the other artists working in a sincere and honest way for whom this threat must be chilling."



BILL EMORY

**MISSILE OFFENSE** As the debate heats up over whether the United States should deploy a "Star Wars Lite" missile defense system, **Peace Action**, the successor to **SANE/Freeze**, is launching six fifty-foot inflatable Trident missiles in a counterstrike—part of its campaign to put nuclear disarmament on the political agenda. Chapters of Peace Action have displayed the mock missiles outside the UN, at a George W. Bush rally in Detroit and at a Raytheon plant in Tucson. California Peace Action will deploy three missiles this summer at press conferences outside twenty-one Congressional offices. Representatives **Barbara Lee**, **Lynn Woolsey** and **Sam Farr** have agreed to participate. The missiles will be unlimbered in LA for the Democratic National Convention.... Peace Action missiles will be flying as a media and grassroots voter-mobilization campaign is geared up by the five-year-old **Peace Voter Fund**. Targeting key House and Senate races in New Jersey, Michigan, Illinois, New York and California, the effort is the most sophisticated yet by the fund, whose goal is getting thousands of new "peace voters" to the polls November 7.

**LAW AGAINST LOVE** As if the Oscar-winning movie *Boys Don't Cry*—the true story of the 1993 murder of a Nebraska woman who posed as a man—hadn't cemented Nebraska's reputation for gay-bashing, now comes a campaign to enact the nation's most sweeping legislation against same-sex couples. Nebraska's Defense of Marriage Committee wants to collect 150,000 signatures by July to force a November vote on a constitutional amendment barring same-sex marriages, domestic partnerships and "civil unions." Thirty-two states have passed laws barring same-sex marriages. Efforts in the Nebraska legislature to enact the ban have been blocked by filibusters by State Senator **Ernie Chambers**, an Omaha independent who lists his occupation as "Defender of the Downtrodden." "I stop a lot of bad things from happening," says Chambers, who favors legalizing same-sex marriage. "It's not the kind of thing Nebraskans should want in their Constitution. A day will come when they realize such a thing brings shame upon the state." Lincoln and Omaha gay and lesbian activists have joined the anti-amendment drive.

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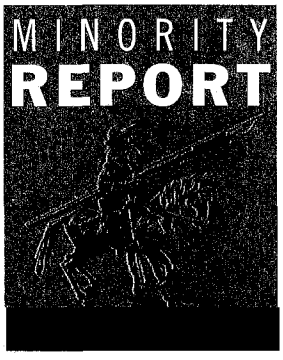
CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS

# Gore on the Hands




I've been writing about the death penalty ever since this shabby campaign began [see "Minority Report," August 23/30, 1999; March 6], and it seems I wasn't wrong in insisting that it could and would, as well as should, become an election issue. The catalytic moment came when George Ryan, the conservative Republican Governor of Illinois, announced a moratorium on executions and established a state commission to investigate the wrongful sentencing of thirteen men to death row. Since then, the pace has quickened with a vote abolishing capital punishment in the New Hampshire legislature, another call for a moratorium—a national one! from Pat Robertson!—and even a proposal from Governor George Pataki of New York that all convictions found unsound on DNA evidence be reviewed. Meanwhile, even the abysmal figure of George W. Bush has felt some of the heat and perhaps responded to poll data showing support for executions to be at a near-historic low. Having shamefully insisted under repeated questioning that there is no reason to doubt Texas's famously callous and incompetent appeals procedure (and having bemerded himself forever by mocking and mimicking Karla Faye Tucker's beseechments for clemency), Bush has issued his first reprieve and at the same time conceded the right of condemned prisoners to ask for DNA testing.

A number of tendencies have converged to produce this suddenly altered climate. The pronounced fall in violent crime has obviously made many people less susceptible to fearmongering. The appalling number of near-miscarriages, very ably publicized by the Death Penalty Information Center and by Amnesty International, is irrefutable evidence for the essential barbarity of the process and is readily intelligible even to the least interested news consumer. I slightly hate to admit it, but to this we must add the strong stand taken by His Holiness the Pope, who in several recent statements has come very close to condemning capital punishment *tout court*. (Somewhere in there, I suspect, is an unintended consequence of the contradictions that have been found in the so-called pro-life position.)

Opponents of the death penalty, who used to think of themselves as being on a par for quixotic eccentricity with the village atheist, now realize that they are neither alone nor absurd. Tucker Carlson of Rupert Murdoch's *Weekly Standard*, who outed Bush for his hateful mimicry above, told me that in an in-house discussion it emerged that almost all the writers for his magazine were abolitionists. But until then, each had thought that he or she was the only one.

What is missing from the above register of conscience and reform? Look at it again—George Ryan, Pat Robertson, George Pataki, Tucker Carlson.... There's barely a Democrat among them. Senator Patrick Leahy of Vermont is a sponsor of the Innocence Protection Act, which would enshrine the right to DNA testing, and Senator Russ Feingold—who's almost an independent—has proposed a moratorium. (The Democratic Governor Jeanne Shaheen vetoed the New Hampshire bill.) But when you've said that you've said everything.

Indeed, the current period of pell-mell "fast track" executions was deliberately inaugurated by the Clinton Administration. In the 1996 election, the very first of the "issue ads," generated by Dick Morris's funny-money slush fund, announced that Clinton was the capital punishment President. He had come by this loathsome distinction dishonestly, as Governor of Arkansas, when he broke off from the New Hampshire primary in 1992 to supervise the execution of a brain-damaged black convict named Rickey Ray Rector. Not even Bush has committed a judicial murder as repellent as that one; it's probable that no Republican governor would dare to stage a photo-op lynching of an African-American, in any case. Think what the liberals would say! If a conservative politician had done such a thing, Rector would be as famous today as Willie Horton. But Rector was put to death in order that Clinton could not be "Willie Hortoned" out of the nomination. So that's all right, then.

Apologists of the "lesser evil" school may argue in their degraded way that such things are sometimes necessary for the winning of elections. But Clinton had already won the election when he put the Anti-Terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act through Congress. This pernicious piece of legislation hugely increased the number of capital offenses and sharply curtailed the options of defendants facing execution. Courts can now refuse to hear new evidence, not just affecting sentencing but touching the original verdict itself, if it has not been presented by a certain deadline. Forget all the old heartwarming movies with their last-minute reprieves and minor triumphs for justice. It is this Clintonian system, indeed, that has necessitated the prudent imposition of the moratorium; the only practicable way to avoid, or at least to slow down, the machinery whereby the poor and the ill-informed and the dark in hue are put to death without a proper hearing.

This is, of course, the terminus to which "lesser evilism" invariably leads. Along with healthcare and human rights "linkage" overseas, the state of civil liberty and judicial fairness in this country is one of the things that are definitely worse than if George Bush had been re-elected in 1992. And if it were not for a few decent and courageous Republicans, the third of these three scandals might have gone on even longer than it did.

For the past three years, the United Nations Commission on Human Rights has adopted a resolution, supported by the countries of the European Union, urging a global moratorium on the execution of the insane, the pregnant and those under 18. Each year, the Clinton Administration has cast the main dissenting vote against this very modest measure. And liberal protest has been practically nil. A few months ago I suggested in this space that George W. Bush be hounded and interrogated at all his public appearances until he said something about his death-row politics. He has now grudgingly and partially done so. It's high time that Vice President Gore was asked where he stands on this essential and infamous part of his boss's "legacy." ■

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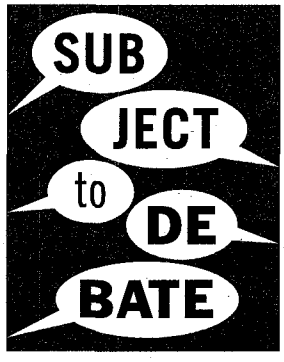
KATHA POLLITT

# Women: Two Steps Forward, One Step Back?




Five years ago, the United Nations' Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing produced a remarkable Declaration and Platform for Action. Adopted unanimously, the documents link women's rights to human rights for the first time in UN history and lay out detailed and ambitious plans for the advancement of girls and women on twelve fronts, including health, political decision-making, education and economic opportunity. The platform calls for universal access to family planning, sex education, equal inheritance rights, and the prevention and punishment of rape and domestic violence, and it condemns job discrimination, forced marriage, coercion in family planning and population programs, female infanticide, female genital mutilation, unsafe abortion (although the right to abortion itself is not mentioned), dowry-related violence and other harmful and unjust practices. It connects women's rights to poverty, environmental degradation, global inequality, warfare and various evils that affect women disparately. The declaration and platform are just pieces of paper—there is no real enforcement mechanism—but as such things go they are pretty strong, and where women have been able to hold their governments' feet to the fire, they have made a difference. Bear in mind too that the Beijing documents represent a consensus produced in the teeth of stern opposition by a handful of reactionary Muslim and Roman Catholic countries. The resistance was orchestrated by the Vatican, which (unlike any other religious organization in the world) holds permanent-observer status, entitling it to participate in negotiations, although not to vote.

As I write, the UN is meeting in a General Assembly special session in New York to assess the implementation of the Beijing agreements. As in Beijing, thousands of women representing hundreds of nongovernmental organizations have come from all around the world to lobby, compare notes and share information on everything from grassroots radio to globalization. A panel attacking religious fundamentalism was crowded with women in veils, chadors, African dress and office wear. I hung around afterward and eavesdropped on a meeting of African women strategizing against sexism in their Protestant churches back home while a member of Ecumenical Women, a Presbyterian group, filled me in on the denomination's growing antifeminist contingent here in the States.

If at Beijing the dominant mood was one of excitement at the prospects for mainstreaming global feminism, in New York it's mostly wariness. The latest UN statistics show some bright patches—most regions have seen declines in early marriage and childbearing; the number of female legislators has increased dramatically in India, Argentina and other countries with gender set-asides and quotas; the gender gap in primary and secondary education is slowly closing. But the overall picture, in that and other studies, is not a happy one: staggering rates of poverty, domestic violence, suicide. Particularly depressing to me was the confirmation of a disconnection between education and income levels: In numerous countries—Jamaica, the Philippines, some Latin American nations—women are better educated than men. But nowhere does that fact result in on-the-job equality.

Some of the major forces threatening women's progress—the widening gap between rich and poor, the shredding of social safety nets to service debts, the explosion in forced trafficking and sexual slavery, the burgeoning AIDS crisis, war—are complex, intractable, hugely costly to solve. That makes it all the more reprehensible that governments have dragged their feet on legal reforms that cost no money, only political will: changing marriage laws that mandate wifely obedience and divorce laws that permit men, but not women, to dissolve the union at will or whim; removing restrictions on basic freedoms, like the right to travel, study or work without permission of a male "guardian." Nigeria permits husbands to "correct" their wives through physical punishment; Costa Rica and at least five other countries allow rapists to avoid prosecution if they marry their victim. In Saudi Arabia women still can't drive. In Kuwait they still can't vote.

Our own government's record is nothing to crow about. The feminist group US Women Connect issued a Platform for Action report card giving this country mostly Bs, Cs and Ds with a big fat F for welfare reform. Underscoring the spotty performance of governments is the threat to the conference itself, which comes from the same fundamentalists and zealots who impede women's progress in their home countries. Once again the Vatican has teamed up with a handful of states—Algeria, Iran, Pakistan, Sudan, Libya—to weaken the language of the Beijing documents. This time around, the US religious right, which has historically opposed the UN's very existence, is joining the fray. That supposedly Christian organizations seem to have more in common with Muslim countries where women are stoned for "adultery" and beaten by police for showing a strand of hair than with the liberal members of their own denominations speaks volumes about their priorities. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, must women still fight the battles of the seventeenth? The way Beijing Plus Five turns out will tell us part of the answer to that question.

* * *

**What can you do?** Join the 541 women's and human rights groups that support the See Change campaign of Catholics for a Free Choice. Attempting to pander to the Catholic vote after his disastrous Bob Jones University visit, George W. Bush has attacked See Change as a bigoted attempt to kick the church out of the UN. In fact, it merely seeks to deprive the Holy See of its permanent-observer status, which is based on the fiction that Vatican City is an actual functioning country and not a tiny masculine enclave like San Quentin or the Knicks. The Catholic Church should be welcome to apply for NGO status and lobby to its heart's content but not to sit at the negotiating table and endlessly stall and shred the delicate consensus process. Contact Catholics for a Free Choice at 1436 U Street NW, Suite 301, Washington, DC 20009. ■

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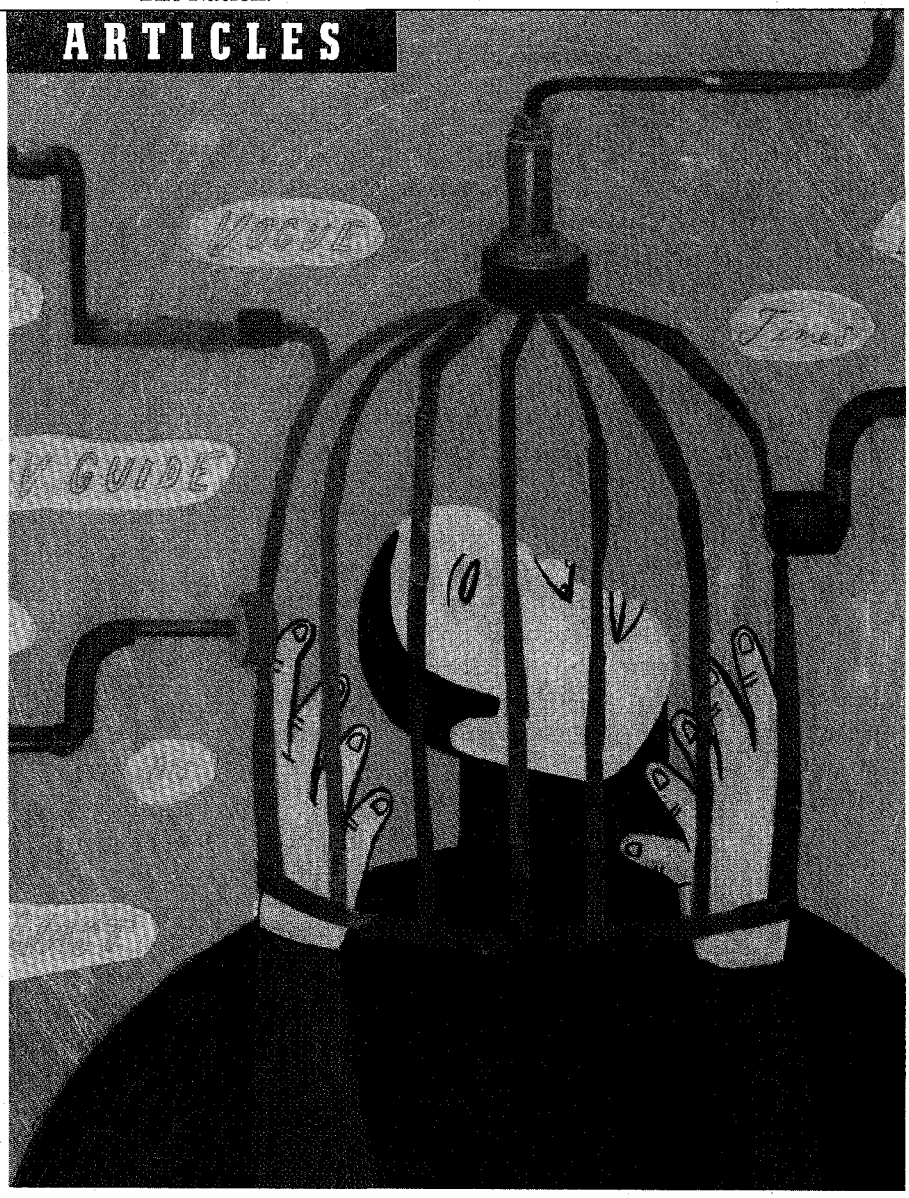

# How a Caged Bird Learns to Sing

## Or, my life at the *New York Times*, CBS and other pillars of the media establishment

**by JOHN LEONARD**

Like a tribal warrior in the Ramayana, throwing dice, juiced on soma, I want to tell some stories and brood out loud. But it's tricky. My favorite stories are all about what *they* did to me. What I've done to myself, I am inclined to repress, sublimate or rationalize. Once upon a time, I was a *Wunderkind*. Now I'm an Old Fart. In between I've done time at *National Review*, Pacifica Radio and *The Nation*; the *New York Times* and Condé Nast; *New York* magazine during and after Rupert Murdoch; National Public Radio and the Columbia Broadcasting System. I was a columnist for *Esquire*, whenever Dwight Macdonald failed to turn in his "Politics" essay; at the old weekly *Life* before it died for *People*'s sins; at *Newsweek* before the *Times* made me stop contributing to a wholly owned subsidiary of its principal competitor; at *Ms.* during its Australian walkabout interim; and at *New York Newsday* before it was so rudely "disappeared" by a Times-Mirror CEO fresh to journalism from the Hobbesian underworlds of microwave popcorn and breakfast-cereal sugar-bombs. And I have written for anyone who ever asked me at newspapers like the *Washington Post*, the *LA Times* and the *Boston Globe*, at magazines like *Harper's*, *The Atlantic Monthly*, *Vogue* and *Playboy*, and at dot-coms like *Salon*. I like to think of myself as having published in the *New York Review*, *The New Statesman*, the *Yale Review* and *Tikkun*. But there was also *TV Guide*.

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This sounds less careerist than sluttish. It is, however, a sluttishness probably to be expected of someone who had to make a living after he discovered that the novels he *reviewed* were a lot better than the novels he *wrote*. We may belong to what the poet Paul Valéry called "the delirious professions"—by which Valéry meant "all those trades whose main tool is one's opinion of one's self, and whose raw material is the opinion others have of you"—but reporters, critics and "cultural journalists," no less than publicists, are caged birds in a corporate canary-cage. Looking back, I see what I required of my employers was that they cherish my every word and leave me alone. If I understand what Warren Beatty was trying to tell us in the movie *Reds*, it is that John Reed only soured on the Russian Revolution after they fucked with his copy.

On the other hand, as Walter Benjamin once explained:

> The great majority of intellectuals—particularly in the arts—are in a desperate plight. The fault lies, however, not with their character, pride, or inaccessibility. Journalists, novelists, and literati are for the most part ready for every compromise. It's just that they do not realize it. And this is the reason for their failures. Because they do not know, or want to know, that they are venal, they do not understand that they should separate out those aspects of their opinions, experiences, and modes of behavior that might be of interest to the market. Instead, they make it a point of honor to be wholly themselves on every issue. Because they want to be sold, so to speak, only "in one piece," they are as unsalable as a calf that the butcher will sell to the housewife only as an undivided whole.

I throw in Walter Benjamin, who killed himself a step ahead of Hitler, to muss the hair of the academics among you. Having been to too many conferences where working reporters and media theorists reach an angry adjournment of minds before the first coffee break, I seek to ingratiate myself. If it'll help to wear a Heidegger safari jacket, Foucault platform heels, Lacan epaulets and a Walter Benjamin boutonniere, I'm willing to bring the Frankfurtives and the Frenchifieds. Indeed, the production process of every major news-gathering organization can be thought of—in Foucault's terms—as an allegory of endless domination, like hangmen torturing murderers or doctors locking up deviants. And whether they know it consciously or not, these organizations are in the "corrective technologies" business of beating down individuals to "neutralize" their "dangerous states"—to create "docile bodies and obedient souls." How we escape their "numbing codes of discipline," if we ever do, is more problematic. Somehow, art, dreams, drugs, madness, "erotic transgression," "secret self-ravishment" and going postal seldom add up to an "insurrection of unsubjugated knowledges." I like to think of myself as Patsy Cline. I sang the same sad country songs before I ever got to the Grand Ole Opry. After the Grand Ole Opry, I can always go back to the honky-tonks.

Another paradigm is sociobiological. Everything is hardwired, from the behavior of ants, beetles, Egyptian fruit bats and adhesive-padded geckos to the role of women, the caste system in India, the IQ test scores of black schoolchildren and the hierarchy of the newsroom. If the people on top of this Chain of Being are mostly male and mostly pale, in the missionary position, talk to Darwin about it. They've been Naturally Selected. Moreover, inside such a white-noise system, there is a positive feedback loop between nature and nurture, thousands of teensy units of obedience training called "culturgens," dictating what societies can and can't do, obsessing in favor of patriarchy and "objectivity," deploring socialism and "bad taste." Having ceded ultimate authority, on the one hand, to the credentialed nitwits of the mini-sciences, and, on the other, to the chirpy gauchos of the media pampas, we may thus find it difficult, ever again, to think through dilemmas of personal conscience, which look a lot like bad career moves.

Molly Ivins, who was fired from the *New York Times* for saying "chickenplucker" in its pages, has admitted that if she ever dies, what it will say on her tombstone is SHE FINALLY MADE A SHREWD CAREER MOVE. Molly also claims that she's actually played, on a jukebox somewhere, a country-western song called "I'm Going Back to Dallas to See if There Could Be Anything Worse Than Losing You."

A third paradigm is novelistic. It's amazing to me how much the controlled environments of both CBS and the *New York Times* resemble Tsau, the utopian community on a Botswana sand dune in Norman Rush's *Mating*, with windmills, boomslangs, dung carts, abacus lessons, militant nostalgia, ceramic death masks, "Anti-Imperialist Lamentations," a Mother Committee and an ostrich farm. And how similar the plantations of Murdoch and Newhouse are to Orwell's *Animal Farm* and Kafka's *Penal Colony*. Whereas Pacifica Radio and *The Nation* bring to mind Voltaire's *Candide*. On these margins, where everyone is paid so poorly that office politics are ideologized into matters of first principle, a little more self-censorship might actually be a good idea. I am reminded of what Amos Oz said in *The Slopes of Lebanon* about the Israeli left:

> The term Phalangist is derived from the Greek word "phalanx." The phalanx, in the Greek and Roman armies, was a unique battle formation. The soldiers were arranged in a closed-square formation, their backs to one another and their faces turned toward an enemy who could neither outflank nor surprise them, because in this formation the men gave full cover to one another in every direction. The lances and spears pointed outward, of course, in all four directions.

The moderate, dovish Israeli left sometimes resembles a reverse phalanx: a square of brave fighters, their backs to the whole world and their faces and their sharpened, unsheathed pens turned on one another.

But, wherever, they always fuck with your copy.

So much for the Big Pixel. And now for the prurient details. And, stuck as I am on my periphery of books, movies and television programs, I can't tell you for sure whether Tom Friedman, when he covered the State Department for the *Times*, should have played tennis with the Secretary of State. Or if Brit Hume, when he covered the White House for ABC, should have played tennis with President Bush. Or if Rita Beamish of the Associated Press should've jogged with George. Or if it was appropriate for George and Barbara to stop by and be videotaped at a media

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*John Leonard is a contributing editor of* The Nation. *This article is adapted from a lecture that was part of a series on self-censorship in the media given at New York University. The lecture series is being published this month in* The Business of Journalism *(New Press).*

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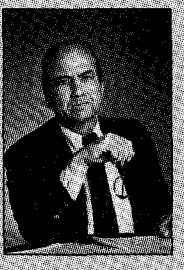

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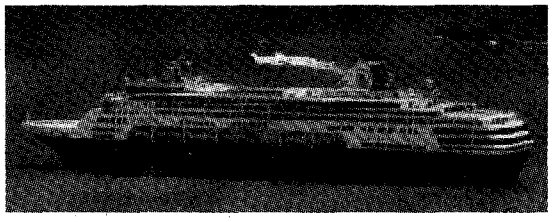

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dinner party in the home of Albert Hunt, the Washington bureau chief of the *Wall Street Journal*, and his wife, Judy Woodruff, then of the *MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour* and now of CNN. Or if one reason Andrea Mitchell, who covered Congress for NBC, showed up so often in the presidential box at the Kennedy Center was that she just happened to be living with Alan Greenspan, the Chairman of the Federal Reserve Board. Nor can I be absolutely positive that there's something deeply compromised about George Will's still ghostwriting speeches for Jesse Helms during his trial period as a columnist for the *Washington Post*, and prepping Ronald Reagan for one of his debates with Jimmy Carter, and then reviewing Reagan's performance the next day, and later on writing speeches for him. Or about Morton Kondracke and Robert Novak's collecting thousands of dollars from the Republican Party for advice to a gathering of governors. Or John McLaughlin's settling one sexual-harassment suit out of court, facing the prospect of at least two more—and nevertheless permitting himself to savage Anita Hill on his *McLaughlin Group*. Or, perhaps most egregious, Henry Kissinger on ABC and in his syndicated newspaper column, defending Deng Xiaoping's behavior during the Tiananmen Square massacre—without telling us that Henry and his private consulting firm had a substantial financial stake in the Chinese status quo.

*It wasn't the fault of ABC journalists that Cap Cities settled the Philip Morris suit before selling out to Disney. But nobody quit, did they?*

For that matter, who knows deep down in our heart of hearts whether the nuclear-power industry will ever get the critical coverage it deserves from NBC, which happens to be owned by General Electric, which happens to manufacture nuclear-reactor turbines? Or if *TV Guide*, while it was owned by Rupert Murdoch, was ever likely to savage a series on the Fox network, also owned by Rupert Murdoch, who was meanwhile busy canceling any HarperCollins books that might annoy the Chinese, with whom he dickered for a satellite-television deal? Or whether ABC, owned by Disney, will ever report anything embarrassing to Michael Eisner, the Mikado of Mousedom? It wasn't the fault of journalists at ABC's *20/20* that Cap Cities settled the Philip Morris suit before selling out to Disney. But nobody quit, did they? Nor was it the fault of journalists at *60 Minutes* that CBS killed another antismoking segment, to be immortalized later in Michael Mann's movie *The Insider*; it was the fault instead of the CBS legal department, on behalf of a Larry Tisch who actually owned a tobacco company of his own, on the eve of the big-bucks sale of the network to Westinghouse. But nobody quit there either, did they? Not even aggrieved producer Lowell Bergman, till two years later. Nor have any of the Beltway bubbleheaded blisterpacks on the all-Monica-all-the-time cable yakshows quit in embarrassment and humiliation, renouncing lucrative lecture fees, after being totally wrong in public about almost everything important ever since the 1989 collapse of the nonprofit police states of Eastern Europe.

Stop me before I go on about the petroleum industry and public television's shamefully inadequate coverage of the Exxon Valdez oil spill, not to mention Shell Oil's ravening of Nigeria. Or say something I'll regret about the $5–11 million a year that the *NewsHour With Jim Lehrer* gets from Archer Daniels Midland, the agribiz octopus whose fixing of prices and bribing of pols got so much attention in 1995 everywhere except on the *NewsHour*. How suspicious is it that so many Random House books were excerpted in *The New Yorker* back when Harry Evans ran the publishing house, his wife, Tina Brown, ran the magazine and all of them were wholly owned subsidiaries of Si Newhouse? Is anybody keeping tabs on what *Time*, *People* and *Entertainment Weekly* have to say about Warner Brothers movies? What else should we expect in a brand-named, theme-parked country where the whole visual culture is a stick in the eye, one big sell of booze, gizmos, insouciance, "lifestyles" and combustible emotions? Where the big-screen re-release of George Lucas's *Star Wars* trilogy is brought to you by Doritos and the associated sale of stuffed Yodas, Muppet minotaurs, trading cards, video games and a six-foot-tall Fiberglas Storm Trooper for $5,000? Where the newest James Bond is less a movie than a music-video marketing campaign for luxury cars, imported beers, mobile phones and gold credit cards? Where Coke and Pepsi duke it out in grammar schools and Burger King shows up on the sides of the yellow buses that cart our kids to those schools, in whose classrooms they will be handed curriculum kits sprinkled with the names of sneaker companies and breakfast cereals? Where there is a logo, a patent, a copyright or a trademark on everything from our pro athletes and childhood fairy tales to the human genome, and Oprah is sued for $12 million by a Texas beef lobby for "disparaging" blood on a bun during a talk-show segment on bovine spongiform encephalopathy and Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease?

And where, I might add, all of us "delirious professionals" sign away, in perpetuity, our intellectual-property rights, our firstborn children and our double-helix to synergizing media monopolies that will downsize our asses before the pension plan kicks in. Marx made a mini-comeback on the 150th birthday of his *Communist Manifesto*. But years before he wrote the *Manifesto* he was overheard to say: "Since money, as the existing and active concept of value, confounds and exchanges everything, it is the universal confusion and transposition of all things, the inverted world, the *confusion and transposition* of all natural and human qualities." In other words, if money's the only way we keep score, every other human relation is corrupted.

There's a great line in one of Grace Paley's books: "Then, as often happens in stories, it was several years later." Let me now get up close and personal.

Not long after I took charge of the *Times Book Review*, in the early seventies, I had a surprise visitor. Lester Markel, the editor who had invented the Sunday *Times* with all its many sections, the eighth-floor Charlemagne who was rumored like Idi Amin to have stocked his fridge with the severed heads of his many enemies, liked to stop in and sit a while, like a bound galley or an urgent memo. This was because, after his forced retirement, he wasn't welcome in anyone else's office. Alone among the editors of the various Sunday sections, I had never worked for or been wounded by him. I was, besides, a fresh ear. It was rather like chewing the early-morning fat with El Cid himself, propped up on a horse but secretly dead.

It turned out that Markel was writing his memoirs. And he was

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having trouble finding a publisher. I made some suggestions and some calls. Never mind the propriety of the editor of the *Times Book Review* lobbying a publisher on behalf of an author with a manuscript for sale. We achieved a contract. And I didn't see Markel for months. Until, of course, galleys of his book came in. And so did he, with suggestions for reviewers. And I had to acquaint him with the etiquette of disinterested criticism. After which he fixed me with the blood-freezing basilisk's eye. And I still had the problem of finding a reviewer who would pay Markel his due as a giant of yore, while not at the same time neglecting to mention his memoir's tendency toward stupefaction—a reviewer who would not only be fair, but who would be perceived as fair by everybody else. I had already been burned by my predecessor, who left me for my very first issue a review of the memoirs of another retired *Times* executive, Turner Catledge, by one of his best friends at the University of Mississippi.

Let me digress for a moment to observe that a *Times* executive who wrote a book could always count on generous review attention so long as he was retired. As Wilfrid Sheed reminded us in *Max Jamison*, his novel about criticism: "They were soft, affable people who wouldn't hurt you because they couldn't bear to be hurt themselves. Paternal organizations were built on great piles of spiritual blubber." But the same has not until recently been true lower down the totem pole, for the serfs. And these serfs write a lot of books. When Christopher Lehmann-Haupt and I alternated as daily critics we looked at these books the same as we'd look at any other. If we liked it or it seemed at least symptomatic of something compelling in the larger culture that we wanted to sermonize about, we'd review it. If not, we didn't. Pretty simple. You'll have noticed that in recent years books by *Times* employees are farmed out to freelancers. They are never reviewed by in-house critics. This, we are told, is to avoid the appearance of conflict of interest. Sounds good. Never mind just how often these outside reviews are actually negative. (I recall two in ten years.) But have you also noticed that this new policy means that *all* books by *Times* writers are *always* reviewed in the daily paper? Minus Saturdays and Sundays, there are 261 book reviews published in the daily *New York Times* every year. There are 65,000 new books published in the United States every year. Some of these books are more equal than others in the paper of record.

Back to Lester Markel, and the paragon I needed to review him. That paragon, clearly, was Ben Bagdikian—a hugely respected, eminently fair-minded, award-winning reporter, and also a gent, who had gone to academe. And he agreed to do the review. And then just when the days before publication of Markel's memoir dwindled down to a precious few, Bagdikian called in a pickle. He had been hired by the *Washington Post*. And the *Washington Post* had a policy that prohibited any of its employees from writing for the *New York Times*. (The *New York Times*, in fact, had the same policy in reverse, which is why they told me to stop writing a TV column for *Newsweek*, which is owned by the *Washington Post*.) Anyway, Ben was stuck. Well, I needed to know, was he still willing to do the review if I could get the *Post* to make an exception in this one instance, to which of course we had entered into an agreement before he sold his soul to the company store? Yes, he said; he'd already done the work.

So I called Bill McPherson, the editor of the *Washington Post*


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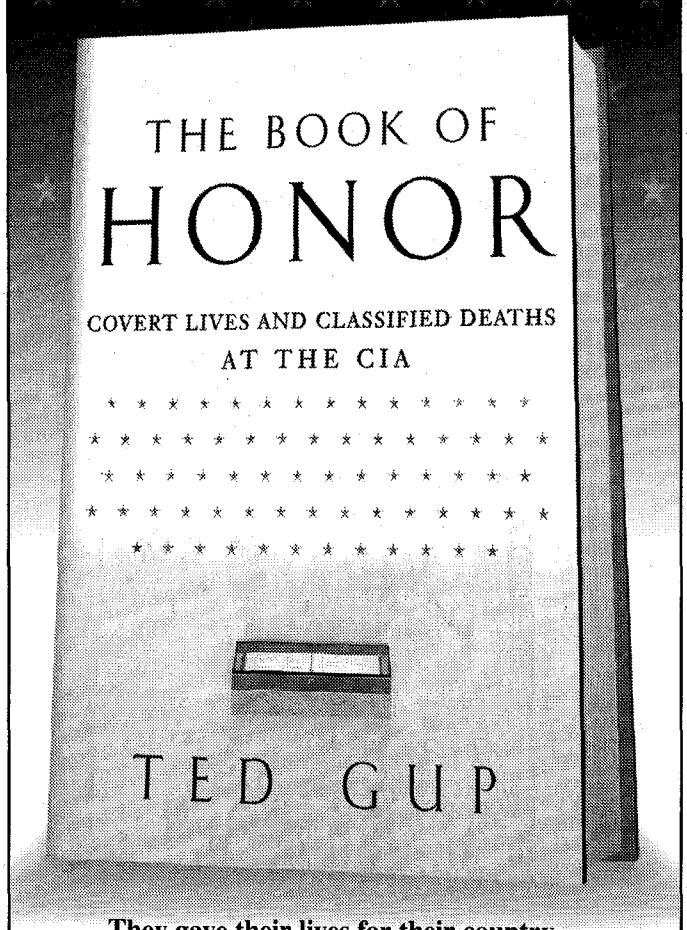


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*Book World*, whom I knew from literary cocktail parties, explaining my Markel problem and beseeching him to intercede on my behalf with *Post* pooh-bah Ben Bradlee, whom I had met once at a *Harvard Crimson* alumni softball game and another time, I'm sorry to say, in the Hamptons. A long week passed. Finally McPherson called. Bradlee would relent on Bagdikian, on one condition. And what was that condition? It was that I, personally, agree to review a book of Bradlee's choice for the *Post*. Done, I said, figuring I'd square it somehow with the *Times*. Which book? Well, Bradlee hadn't made up his mind. OK, so I got my Bagdikian review, which was as scrupulous as I'd hoped, and published it, which stung Markel to furious rebuttal in a letter to the editor, which received from Bagdikian a mildly puzzled response, which correspondence dragged on intolerably until I called it off, after which I never saw Lester Markel in my office again.

But that's not the point of this story. A year later the phone rang, and it was McPherson, and he said: "Bradlee's calling in his chit." Which book, I asked? Well—and McPherson was embarrassed—Sally Quinn is about to publish a book on her year at CBS. That's the one. Many of you are too young to remember that there was a Ben Bradlee before Jason Robards played him in the film version of *All the President's Men*, and that this Ben Bradlee left his wife for Sally Quinn, a reporter for the *Washington Post* "Style" section, and that this Sally Quinn then left the *Post*, very briefly, for a CBS morning show about which most TV critics had been savage, although at least one of us, me, had been lukewarm in *Life*.

Nor is the point of this story that I refused to write that book review. The point is that Lester Markel had no business in my office, that I had no business trying to find him a publisher or to arrange for a judicious review—and that Bradlee's way is how the big boys play the game. While making sure your girlfriend gets a talked-about review, at the same time sticking it to your principal competitor. Only Bagdikian emerges with honor. Which, some years later, is exactly what I told a class Bagdikian taught in "The Ethics of Journalism" at Berkeley. These students, including my own son, were amused at an anecdote starring their professor, but didn't get the ethics of it. It seemed sort of locker-room to them, as it seemed to grad students from the Columbia Journalism School in a seminar I later taught myself. They were all children of the triumph of a glossier idea of journalism that postures in front of experience, rather than engaging it; that looks in its cynical opportunism for an angle, or a spin, or a take, instead of consulting compass points of principle; that strikes attitudes like matches, the better to admire its wiseguy profile in the mirror of the slicks.

I am aware that my own regard for books is overly worshipful—one part Hegel, two parts Tinkerbell, with garnishes of Sacred Text, Pure Thought and Counter-Geography—at a time when most of the dead trees in the chain stores have titles like *How I Lost Weight, Found God, Smart-Bombed Ragheads, and Changed My Sexual Preference in the Bermuda Triangle*. But I also know it's just as hard to write a bad book as a good one, and a lot easier to review one than achieve one, and if book critics in mainstream newspapers and magazines seem to have appointed themselves the hall monitors of an unruly schoolboy culture—this

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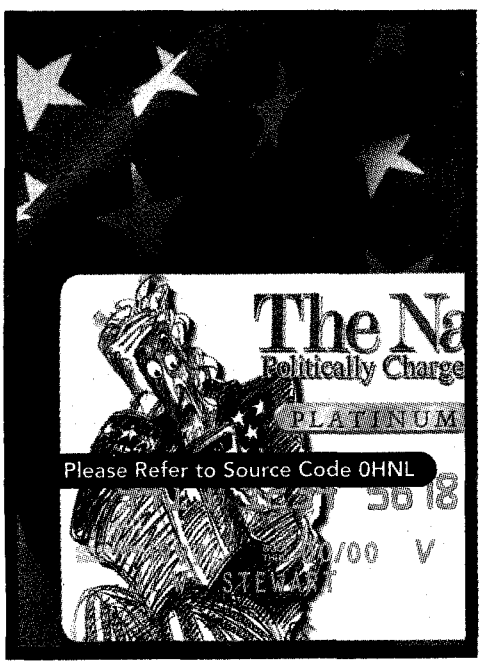


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one gets a pass to go to the lavatory; that one must sit in the corner wearing a dunce cap—then it is a condescension and a contempt passed down and internalized from bosses like Bradlee, for whom the whole process is a whimsical scam. I've yet to meet a media heavy who didn't think all of the books by all of his friends deserve fawning reviews. Nor have I met a media heavy who thought I should ever employ as a reviewer anybody who has ever criticized him or his friends. Max Frankel, who accuses me in his autobiography of trying to turn the *Times Book Review* into a combination of *The Village Voice* and *The New York Review of Books*, once called me on the carpet for using Timothy Crouse as a reviewer, because Crouse had made fun of his Washington press corps friends in *The Boys on the Bus*. Abe Rosenthal not only called me on the carpet for saying nice things on the daily book page about I.F. Stone and Nat Hentoff, but suspended me from the job entirely after I panned a book, *The Second Stage*, by his friend Betty Friedan. The next thing I knew, they'd killed a *sports* column I wrote, during the pro football strike, pointing out that the head of the Players Union, Ed Garvey, used to spook for the CIA. This of course goes beyond the butthole politics of the buddy-bond. It's over in another office, where foreign editor Jimmy Greenfield killed a "Private Lives" column I wrote about the Philippines, back when the Frog Prince Ferdinand and his Dragon Lady were still in charge, and playwrights like Ben Cervantes were still in prison, and Greenfield in New York knew more about it than I did in Manila, where a goon in a blue jumpsuit followed me out of the Palace of Culture, all over the landfill in the Bay, unto a lurid jeepney.

*I've yet to meet a media heavy who didn't think all of the books by all of his friends deserve fawning reviews.*

This sounds like whining. It *is* whining. A primary characteristic of any news organization are subcultures of the crybaby and the gripe. (As if we ever had it harder than a schoolteacher, a factory worker, a farmer or a cop; as if we'd ever been threatened with redundancy, much less a firing squad; as if our slippery slide weren't down into a wad of cotton candy.) And so I could go on about what happened to Richard Eder as the drama critic, and to Ray Bonner at El Mozote, and the class-action suit by the women of the *Times*, for which I was deposed, and Roger Wilkins, who quit the paper to write his own book (which I so incautiously reviewed), and Jerzy Kosinski, and Neil Sheehan, and Attica, and AIDS. I could even tell you about having to write my review of the first volume of Henry Kissinger's memoirs two days early, so that it could go all the way to the top to be vetted, after which I was permitted to suggest that some of us, on hearing from Henry that his only sleepless night in public service had been on the eve of his first mixer with the Red Chinese debutantes—well, some us thought maybe he should have tossed and turned more often. And I still don't know who cut the last two paragraphs of a review I wrote in 1970 about a couple of JFK assassination books. Those two paragraphs, asking perplexed questions about the sloppiness of the Warren Commission Report, simply vanished between the first edition and the last—an incriminating fact on microfilm periodically rediscovered by assistant professors of conspiracy theory, who write me paranoid letters that I dutifully forward to Abe.

No wonder that when Ed Diamond, while researching his book on the *Times*, mentioned my name to John Rothman, Keeper of the Archives, Rothman sniffed: "Some people just aren't good *Times*men." And then just as promptly edited himself: "Some people aren't good *organizational* men." I could live happily with that, had I quit on any one of a dozen fraught occasions. But I allowed myself to be promoted instead, and stuck around for sixteen years. And when I did finally leave, it wasn't about a matter of principle. Those of us who go over the wall—who leave the Catholic Church or the Communist Party or the *New York Times*—usually decide at last to jump because of something small. You have swallowed a whole history of whoppers, but there is a fatigue about your faith. Without any warning, the elastic snaps, and you are hurled out of the closed system into empty space, and your renunciation, arrived at by so many increments, looks almost capricious. In my case, I decided to believe that the brand-new *Vanity Fair* would be a serious magazine, as did many of my friends. And so we entered the halls of Condé Nast like the children who followed Stephen of Vendôme south to Marseille in 1212, expecting the Club Med to part like a Red Sea, allowing us to pass over to the Promised Land. We were sold instead into slavery in Egypt. Well, it wasn't that bad. Actually, I was in Jerusalem writing a story on Peace Now when they called the King David to tell me to come home, that they'd fired the editor who had hired me and it wasn't going to be a Peace Now kind of magazine anymore. But when we leap over the wall, we always imagine that they, whoever they are, will love us more in the outside world. They will love us just as much, or as little, as we serve their interest.

But to finish with the *Times*: When I told them I was quitting, first they said I had promised I never would. Well, never say never. Then they explained, "The *Times* is a centrist institution, and *you* are not a centrist." Fair enough, although the center sure had moved since they hired me directly out of the antiwar movement. Finally, they screamed at me: "We made you! You'd be nothing without the *Times*!" This surprised. It had never before occurred to me that they'd published what I wrote, two or three times a week, out of the kindness of their hearts—that we hadn't been somehow *even* every day. For years after, I thought of this departing as Freudian-dysfunctional. Maybe they wanted to be our fathers. Maybe *we* wanted them to be our fathers. Oedipus! Peter Pan! Then I began to wonder whether there wasn't about our servitude elements of an abusive marriage—tantrums, fists and fear; excuses, apologies and denials; dependency and self-loathing—battered wives and battered writers. Now, contemplating all the ghosts in this denial machine, I'm inclined to remember the theater tickets, and the stock options, and all the cocktail parties I got invited to as if I were important.

Paul Krassner, the Yippie editor of *The Realist*, once explained to a conference on "Media and the Environment" how to tell the difference between "news" and "dreaming." When you see something you don't believe, you should flap your arms like wings. If you seem then to be flying, it's a dream. In this dreamtime, I am overdue at CBS, where I've spent the last twelve years.

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Before I was hired at *Sunday Morning*, I asked for a free hand in choosing which television programs I reviewed, regardless of network. My own credibility was at stake. I was assured of a hands-off policy. That was three presidents of CBS News ago.

In fact, for the first seven or so years, I was, if not ignored, then rather negligently embraced as a sort of punctuation mark, a change of rhythm or a passionate parenthesis, in one of the vanishingly few network news programs to embody and cherish old-fashioned journalistic standards. When *Sunday Morning* wasn't thinking about culture, its splendid idea of news was to notice that, hey, here's a social problem; here are some people trying to do something about it; why don't we spend eight whole minutes seeing if what they're doing actually works? Those of you who only recall Charles Kuralt as a kind of Johnny Appleseed of avuncular anecdotes and homespun decencies need reminding that he'd been a fine reporter in Southeast Asia and Latin America; that he went to China at the time of Tiananmen, where his take was very different from Dr. Kissinger's; that he expressed his doubts, over the air, about the Gulf War. It's not just that he listened better than most people talk; he was an exacerbated conscience of his profession. He even refused to appear on the *Murphy Brown* sitcom: "I don't know where the line is," he told me, "but that's crossing it." With his passing, we were diminished in heart and jumping beans.

*Charles Kuralt refused to appear on the* Murphy Brown *sitcom. 'I don't know where the line is,' he told me, 'but that's crossing it.'*

The world of television journalism has been changing, not since O.J. or Monica or the Internet, but ever since they discovered that news can be a "profit center." I should have got an inkling my first year on air, when I reviewed a public-TV documentary on Edward R. Murrow, whose valor and grace made him our very own tragic hero. Emerging on CBS television from the radio and the war, he grasped the new medium's power to modify the way a nation thought about itself, then watched helplessly as the medium pawned that power to the ad agencies, and smoked himself to death. He even looked like Camus, the Shadow Man of the French Resistance—Bogart with a microphone. We were reminded in the documentary that he'd been stunned when they opened the gates of Buchenwald. That he cared so much about words, he often forgot to look at the camera. That he made up *See It Now* as he went along, forever over budget. That after his famous demolition job on Joe McCarthy, Alcoa dropped its sponsorship of *See It Now* and William Paley, the Big Eye in the Black Rock Sky, turned against his best-known reporter, bumping the program from the prime-time schedule. That in his last years at CBS before he resigned in 1961 there were many more *Person to Person* chats with the likes of Marilyn Monroe than there had ever been exposés like *Harvest of Shame*, on the plight of the migrant farmworkers. What I should have noticed at the time was the allegorical nature of the Murrow story. In every institution of our society, but especially in the media, there have always been brilliant young men (and men almost all of them have always been) who find surrogate fathers as Murrow found Paley. For a while in this relationship of privilege, patronage and protection, these young men imagine they can go on being brilliant, on their own terms, forever, immune to the bottom-line logic of a corporate culture that, for its own reasons, has surrounded and preserved them in aspic. But we are not fathers and sons at all; we are landlords and tenants; owners and pets. It shouldn't surprise the brilliant young men, and yet it always surprises the brilliant young men, when the party's over and the pets are put to sleep.

I am once again peripheral to the larger story. But when CBS lost pro football, and then a bunch of affiliate stations, to Rupert Murdoch's Fox, everybody freaked. One Thursday, I went in as usual to submit a script for TelePrompTing, record the voice-over for my tape package and go home again to watch more television. Later that afternoon, the executive producer called. The then-president of CBS News—he's gone now, Eric Ober, or how likely is it that I'd be telling you this?—had seen that I was reviewing a TV movie forthcoming on Fox, a feature-length reprise of the old *Alien Nation* sci-fi series, and he'd hit the roof. He had to go to an affiliates' meeting next Monday morning. They would chew his ears off after hearing their own network promote a program on the evil empire's competing schedule. I said I had been specifically promised that this would never happen; that, anyway—and never mind my poor powers to cloud anybody's mind, including A.C. Nielsen's—it couldn't really be my problem if the stock of the corporation went up or down, or if the president of CBS News had to go to an affiliates' meeting or a therapist. I was told they'd get back to me, and late that night they did. The president was adamant. Then, I said, I guess I'll have to quit. Don't be silly and overreactive, I was told. And then the executive producer *handled* me. A month before, I had proposed a piece about Doris Lessing, on the occasion of her 75th birthday and the publication of the first volume of her autobiography. Nobody, then, had been interested. But now, if I wanted to sit down immediately and write it up, they'd run it on Sunday in place of *Alien Nation*. Quid pro quo, Q.E.D., ad nauseam and beat vigorously.

It occurs to me that thirty years ago *Life* rejected one of my "Cyclops" columns, about Richard Nixon as a jack-in-the-box television President: Surprise! Look what Daddy brought home from the cold war! A secret bombing of Cambodia! Then, too, I vented at length to a sympathetic but helpless editor. The next day, *Life* sent me a brand-new color TV set—my very first. All night long, with my children, I shopped for friendship in the gorgeous beer commercials. So Doris Lessing is a sort of color television set.

What followed Doris Lessing—since, if I couldn't review the network competition, I refused to review CBS, although cable and public television were still fair game—was some strong encouragement for me to branch out more, into movies and books. This made rationalizing easy. More books is always better. Free movies spice it up, even while you quickly realize that TV is more various and interesting. They still, amazingly, let me say exactly what I want to about abortion and capital punishment, racism and homophobia, misogyny and war. (We are hired for our stylistic bag of tricks, our jetstream vapor trails, not our politics. Had my politics been right-wing rather than left, somebody else would have overpaid for this vapor.) And there's a new

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president of CBS News. If I combine network shows in a thematic clump, one from column A, two from column B, I'm back in the consumer-guide business. What's more, this wandering in the wilderness has led me to realize that we end up, in the cultural-journalism business, reviewing the buzz more often than the artifact itself. That the more money spent on promotion, the more attention we have to pay, no matter what our opinion. If it is heavily hyped, it automatically becomes newsworthy. So long as we are talking about what everybody else is talking about, we will sound *smart*. Never mind the little foreign movie with the distracting subtitles—nobody else will review it, either. So I'm smarter now. Flap your arms if you think you're dreaming.

The sad thing is that, since now at last I am old enough to be too old, almost, for network television—a demographic undesirable to the ad agencies—my very senior citizenship means that my children are out of college, I own the roof over my head, and I ought to be immune to the terrors of authenticity. I need not be beholden to those who choose to leak on me, nor belong to any hard-wired paradigm that imagines itself a fourth branch of the government, even a separate country, with its own pomp, protocols, dress codes, foreign policy and official secrets, lacking only its own anthem and maybe a helicopter beanie. And yet the *Times* paid for that house, CBS bought me a new kitchen, and in the last decade I have vacationed in China, Egypt, India and Zimbabwe. I've actually stayed in hotels like the Danieli in Venice, the Peninsula in Hong Kong and the Oriental in Bangkok, in spite of the fact that I know I don't belong there—that you can take the boy out of his class, but not that class out of the boy.

This is the deepest censorship of the self, an upward mobility and a downward trajectory. Once upon a time way back in high school, we thought of reporters as private eyes. We thought of journalism as a craft instead of a club of professional perkies who worried about summer homes, Tuscan vacations, Jungian analysis, engraved invitations to Truman Capote parties and private schools for our sensitive children. We scratched down an idea on a scrap of yellow paper, typed it up on an Underwood portable, took it below to the print shop, set it on a Linotype machine, read that type upside down, ran off a proof on a flatbed press and seemed somehow to connect brain and word, muscle and idea, blood and ink, hot lead and cool thought. But that was long before we got into the information-commodities racket, where we have more in common with Henry Kravis and Henry Kissinger than we do with paper-makers, deliverymen and Philip Marlowe, or those ABC technicians who were so recently so alone, on strike, on Columbus Avenue. After which our real story is ourselves, at the Century Club or Elaine's or a masked ball charity scam—Oscar de la Renta, Alex Solzhenitsyn and Leona Helmsley invite you to Feel Bad About the Boat People at the Museum of Modern Art—with plenty of downtime left, after we have crossed a picket line by e-mailing our copy to the computer, to mosey over to Yankee Stadium, where Boss Steinbrenner will lift us up by our epaulets to his skybox to consort with such presbyters of the Big Fix as Roy Cohn and Donald Trump, and you can't tell the pearls from the swine. ■

LEFT AND RIGHT FIND MUCH TO CRITICIZE, BUT THE PUBLIC APPLAUDS HER GOOD SENSE.

# Reno: Getting It From All Sides

**LARS-ERIK NELSON**

A week after she ordered federal agents to seize Elián González from his relatives in Miami, Republican critics were snarling, the Miami Cuban community was venting its rage in street demonstrations, legal scholars were debating the proprieties of the federal magistrate's warrant that was employed in the snatch—and Janet Reno's office at the Justice Department was filled to overflowing with flowers from ordinary Americans. In a particularly creative act of spite, someone flew over Miami's Little Havana in a small plane that trailed a banner saying, AMERICA LOVES JANET RENO.

GAYLE HEGLAND

When GOP senators confronted her for an explanation of the Miami raid, they were careful to do it not only in closed session but in a secure, specially insulated room on the fourth floor of the Capitol that's normally used for top-secret intelligence briefings. The senators were not trying to protect sensitive national security information but to avoid an increasingly common embarrassment: When members of Congress challenge the soft-spoken, gawky Reno, she routinely makes them look like a bunch of cranky 8-year-olds. Indignant demands for public hearings on the Elián operation dissolved as politicians found that the public opposed them by a margin that soon rose to 2 to 1.

For Reno, the Elián case was a decisive political victory. She has been involved in a relentless series of explosive controversies—from the 1993 Branch Davidian siege in Waco, Texas, to the prosecution of Los Alamos National Laboratory scientist Wen Ho Lee—all of which opened her to accusations of incompetence, cover-ups and partisanship. But in the Elián case, Reno managed to marginalize the right. Conservative Republicans instinctively and almost unanimously sided with the Miami Cubans; the public supported Reno. After seven years in which she has suffered unusually personal and nasty criticism, the public has decided that it trusts her more than it trusts her critics, with their rants about

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jackbooted federal thugs, their intricate conspiracy theories and their endless Congressional and journalistic investigations into charges that somehow evaporate upon scrutiny.

If she were politically or personally closer to the President—as attorneys general have historically tended to be—some of the conservative or editorial-page criticism might have stuck. But her independence, though it has rankled the Clinton Administration, has been the best possible defense against the most serious of the conservative charges: that she has corrupted justice to protect her political patrons. In fact, she has bent over backward in naming independent counsels to investigate her colleagues; the charges in virtually every case have come to nought.

The list of conflicts in which Reno has been forced to play a central role is an unrelenting catalogue of thankless tasks: the traditional replacement of all US Attorneys when she first took office; the disaster at Waco, in which eighty-one people, including twenty-five children, were killed; the revenge taken for Waco by the men who bombed the federal building in Oklahoma City two years later; the series of independent counsels she sought for investigations of fellow members of the Cabinet, including President Clinton himself; her agreement to expand independent counsel Kenneth Starr's mandate to include the Monica Lewinsky case; her refusal to appoint an independent counsel to investigate Vice President Al Gore's fundraising from the White House; her refusal to authorize a wiretap on Wen Ho Lee amid the explosive charge that he was suspected of passing nuclear weapons secrets to China; the failure to move quickly against former Director of Central Intelligence John Deutch, who violated CIA security rules; the Microsoft antitrust suit; and the Elián case, in which her own Vice President undercut her by recommending that Elián be given permanent residency in this country. She is currently contemplating an almost-hopeless prosecution of Chilean strongman Augusto Pinochet for masterminding the 1976 murder in Washington of Chilean diplomat Orlando Letelier and his colleague, Ronni Moffitt.

*To me her great contribution is that she served with integrity during an unusually vicious era in American politics.*

Calls for Reno's resignation or dismissal have become commonplace—over Waco, her failure to appoint an independent counsel to investigate campaign fundraising abuses, the Wen Ho Lee and John Deutch cases. In the House, Representative Dan Burton, a Republican from Indiana who is chairman of the Government Reform Committee, called her "incapable of conducting a legitimate investigation of the White House." Interestingly enough, for ammunition in his attacks Burton quotes the *New York Times*, whose editorial page and two Washington columnists have hectored Reno mercilessly. The *Times*, for example, has accused Reno of being "incompetent and politically biased" and of committing "an unforgivable dereliction of duty" in failing to name an independent counsel to investigate Gore; has charged her with "dedication to protecting Democratic Party interests from start to finish"; and of sounding "like a technicality-hunting defense lawyer" for the Administration who "comes not to expose political corruption but to bury it."

Reno gets it from all sides. Democrats regard her as disloyal for being so ready to name independent counsels; Republicans see her as a political hack. Some on the left fault her for not bringing a broader vision to her job and complain that she is basically a local district attorney raised to a national level; conservatives routinely accuse her of failing to be a sufficiently tough prosecutor.

It is difficult to measure the performance of an Attorney General. The crime rate is down, but that may be the result of broader economic or social forces. She has championed more partnerships between federal and state authorities. She has been a tireless public speaker whose central theme is that if children are mistreated by abusive parents—slapped for no reason and then ignored when they misbehave—they grow up confused about the meaning of, and penalties for, misconduct. Reno is certainly not a leading legal theorist, a role that may more properly belong to the Solicitor General than to the Attorney General. But to me her great contribution is that she served with integrity during an unusually vicious era in American politics, one in which criminal charges were wildly tossed about by the President's critics in Congress and in the press.

"One doesn't get the sense of a grand vision from Reno," says Professor Herman Schwartz of American University. "She was a good journeyman prosecutor and a decent person, but her Justice Department has been party to some very severe hits on civil rights." Schwartz cites as examples expansion of wiretaps; restrictions on the use of habeas corpus, which allows convicts to appeal state trials in federal courts; and denial of hearings for undocumented seekers of political asylum in illegal immigration cases. He adds, "You can't expect much of a civil liberties vision on the part of a local district attorney."

Representative Jerrold Nadler, a New York Democrat and member of the House Judiciary Committee, holds Reno and her Justice Department responsible for defending summary denials of political asylum. "If you come to this country without proper documentation, the immigration officer can make the determination that you are not entitled to asylum, and there is no appeal, no hearing, no right to go before a judge," Nadler said. "But it is precisely the person fleeing the Gestapo or SAVAK who has no proper documentation. This is a terrible assault on civil rights."

Father Robert Drinan, who teaches legal ethics at Georgetown University, says he is disappointed in Reno for failing to do more to eliminate the death penalty or reduce the US prison population. "She has [twenty federal prisoners] on death row and almost 2 million people in prison," he said. "I don't think that shows any leadership." Drinan also faults Reno for supporting a rule that exempted federal prosecutors from state bar association prohibitions against directly contacting a person known to be represented by a lawyer. Ironically, such direct contact was one of the complaints made against Kenneth Starr when his office tried to negotiate with Monica Lewinsky in the absence of her lawyer; Reno supported Starr's position.

In addition to such criticism, Reno has been the subject of no fewer than ten lawsuits from a private group called Judicial Watch, funded in part by the right-wing multimillionaire Richard Mellon Scaife and protected by a complaisant federal judge,

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Royce Lamberth, who has allowed Judicial Watch chairman Larry Klayman extraordinary latitude in conducting endless, rambling depositions of government officials. (Among the questions Klayman repeatedly asks is whether any of the government officials has ever talked to me.) Justice Watch says in one of its characteristic press releases that "it is clear that our Department of Justice has degenerated into a national disgrace. It is now itself a cesspool of corruption. Judicial Watch will continue to file one lawsuit after another against Ms. Reno and her compliant sycophants until justice, real justice is done."

Given the passion and variety of the charges against her, one might be seduced into thinking they must also have some legal or at least ethical merit. This would be a mistake, as a look at the individual cases will show.

Acting for President Clinton, Reno was first criticized for requesting the resignations of seventy-seven politically appointed US Attorneys shortly after she took office. In fact, the spoils system is as old as President Andrew Jackson. "This is a total bum rap," says Washington attorney Richard Ben-Veniste. "Every time there's a change of administration, they appoint new US Attorneys."

Then came Waco. A little over a month into her job, the FBI persuaded her that children were being abused inside the Branch Davidian compound at Waco, Texas. The FBI's experts further assured her that CS gas could be safely used and that there was little risk that the Branch Davidians would commit suicide in the event of a raid. All three assurances were false, but Reno, new to Washington, trusted the experts, just as President Kennedy trusted the CIA experts who recommended the 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba. When the Waco raid failed, she took full responsibility for it, introducing herself to a national audience during this tragedy as a straight talker who shunned the normal formulation that "mistakes were made." "This was a judgment I made," she told ABC's Ted Koppel. "I think the responsibility lies with me."

Reno's most persistent politico-legal problem has centered around her decisions on naming special prosecutors or, later, independent counsels to investigate so-called covered persons—high-ranking members of the Administration against whom there is credible evidence of a crime. The method of appointing such counsels was that evidence was submitted to Reno, and if she agreed that there was a credible accusation against a covered person, she would ask a three-judge panel appointed by Chief Justice William Rehnquist to name a counsel. She has come under sniper fire from Clinton Administration officials for being too quick to ask for counsels, and under heavy-artillery fire from Republicans for refusing to request a counsel to investigate Democratic fundraising. Both sides find the same fault: She has followed the letter of the law too closely, rather than its intent.

Thus, Democrats blame her for appointing independent counsels in connection with relatively trivial charges against former Agriculture Secretary Mike Espy and former Housing Secretary Henry Cisneros. But there were in fact plausible charges of wrongdoing against both men, and in addition, Cisneros admitted that he had misled the FBI about how much money he paid to a former mistress. Both the Espy and Cisneros cases showed, however, the potential for abuse of the Independent Counsel Act, which has since expired.

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In the case of Espy, who was prosecuted somewhat bizarrely under the Meat Inspection Act of 1907 for accepting sports tickets and other favors, independent counsel Donald Smaltz spent four years and $17 million, and then saw a jury bring back thirty "not guilty" verdicts. Undaunted by this defeat, he uttered a statement that must rank among the atrocities of jurisprudence in this century: "The actual indictment of a public official may in fact be as great a deterrent as a conviction of that official."

The Cisneros prosecution was equally abusive. Independent counsel David Barrett charged Cisneros with felonies worth ninety years in prison for concealing the extent of his relationship with a former mistress. Then, on the first day of jury selection, he allowed Cisneros to plead guilty to one misdemeanor and pay a $10,000 fine.

Independent counsels were also named to investigate Commerce Secretary Ron Brown, who was killed in an airplane crash before the conclusion of the case, and to investigate Labor Secretary Alexis Herman and Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt, against both of whom no charges were filed.

*'This was a judgment I made. I think the responsibility lies with me.'*
*—Attorney General Janet Reno, after Waco*

"Espy, Cisneros, Babbitt and Herman—those four cases really irked the White House," says a former Clinton aide. "She pissed people off all the time because she was so independent. She just did not act like a political appointee. She was on the borderline of insubordination."

"She probably could have exercised some discretion over some of those earlier appointments," says Ben-Veniste, a veteran of the Nixon Watergate investigations who is now in private practice. "But the basic flaw is in the triggering mechanism in the statute."

Most famously, Reno called for a special prosecutor—the first of whom was New York lawyer Robert Fiske, later replaced by Kenneth Starr under the revived Independent Counsel Act—to investigate President Clinton for an ever-expanding series of alleged offenses, starting with his Whitewater investments and going on to include the suicide of deputy White House counsel Vincent Foster, the dismissal of seven aides in the White House Travel Office, the Monica Lewinsky scandal and Mrs. Clinton's billing records while at the Rose Law Firm. Given this record, it is hard to accuse Reno of going out of her way to protect her fellow Democrats.

On the contrary, in the Lewinsky matter she could quite easily have been more skeptical about Starr's claim that the case was a natural outgrowth of his earlier investigation and that he had no prior involvement in the Paula Jones lawsuit, which had called Lewinsky as a witness. And despite evidence of Starr's misconduct—both in leaks and in advocating impeachment (thus going beyond the independent counsel's mandate in a manner that caused Starr's ethics adviser, Sam Dash, to resign)—Reno never exercised her authority to remove him, which she had a right to do.

In the case of Gore's fundraising, Reno also stuck to the letter of the law. It is illegal to seek federal campaign contributions from a federal building. Gore admittedly raised money from his office. But "federal campaign contribution" is a term of art. It refers only to money raised for the express advocacy of the election or defeat of a federal candidate. What Gore sought was the unlimited "soft money" contributions that are supposedly used by the parties for general education purposes.

In the end, Gore's soft money was mixed in with "hard money." The question then became whether he knew of that mixing, and Gore came up with the story of drinking so much iced tea that he may have had to leave the room, thereby missing that part of the discussion. This excuse may be ludicrous, but it is not specific and credible evidence that a federal crime may have been committed. Faced with this thin evidence that Gore had committed a felony, Reno refused to name an independent counsel to investigate him.

Professor John Barrett of the St. John's University Law School, a former Justice Department employee under Reno, says her integrity is unquestionable, but he faults her in the Gore case for being too literal. "Her use of the various statutes has sometimes blinded her to the larger purpose of those statutes," he says. "She got trapped by the intricacies and didn't see that the broader purpose of the law was to get such cases out of the hands of the Justice Department to remove all suspicion of partiality."

For that reason—the avoidance of all suspicion—former US Attorney Charles LaBella urged Reno in a secret memo to name a special prosecutor to investigate the fundraising abuses. When Reno overruled both him and FBI Director Louis Freeh, Republicans complained that she was covering up for Gore for political reasons. But LaBella deflated such speculation in an appearance on NBC's *Meet the Press*. LaBella said it was not clear that any crime had been committed, and he defended Reno in these words: "I don't think anybody was protecting anybody. I really don't believe that the Attorney General, in any way, shape or form, was protecting anybody or anybody else at the Justice Department was politically protecting anybody."

Having heard LaBella's argument, Representative Nadler is convinced Reno made the right decision: "LaBella was saying she should have appointed a counsel and subjected Gore and God knows who else to hundreds of thousands of dollars in legal fees even though he didn't think a crime had been committed. I'm very glad she didn't do that." One might suspect that Reno refused to name a prosecutor to investigate Gore because she had seen how abusive and open-ended the earlier investigations had become. But Barrett points out, "She has never made that argument."

The Wen Ho Lee case was a peculiar form of hysteria that sucked in Democrats as well as Republicans. Lee, a computer scientist at the Los Alamos National Laboratory, was an initial suspect in an FBI investigation into the loss of nuclear warhead data to China. But the evidence against him was so thin that Justice Department officials refused to authorize a wiretap on his telephone. In outrage, Democratic Senator Robert Torricelli bullied Reno, according to *The American Lawyer*, in a closed meeting in which he more or less blamed her for conniving in the loss of US military secrets. In fact, anybody who examined the evidence against Lee—as Torricelli had not done—could see there was no basis to charge him with espionage, and

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he has not been so charged to this day. He is accused of downloading secret files—many of which were formally classified only after he had downloaded them—onto an unauthorized computer. Lee's case is scheduled for trial in November.

Finally, in the case of Elián González, the law has been reasonably clear. A child cannot normally claim political asylum in defiance of his parents' wishes. After months of negotiating with Elián's Cuban relatives in Miami, Reno revoked the authority she had granted them to care for the boy and ordered federal agents to seize him and return him to his father. Reno's reluctance to use force opened her up to a hectoring attack in the *New York Times* by Maureen Dowd, who interpreted her caution as dithering: "Ms. Reno gets easily intimidated by worst-case scenarios. Highlight reels of her disasters play in her head in an endless loop, negating every option." The very next day, however, the *Times* editorial page praised her: "Ms. Reno has shown commendable restraint, and is wise to avoid a confrontation in Miami between federal authorities and Cuban-Americans who oppose Elián's return to his father."

These two conflicting views are typical of commentary on Reno's performance; the same set of facts produces widely disparate opinions, from the most scathing abuse to generous praise, with the critics and defenders acting as if they have an open-and-shut case that is beyond dispute. In early June a federal appeals court panel affirmed the INS's jurisdiction in allowing Elián's father to speak for him in the custody dispute; unless further appeals succeed, Elián and his father will return to Cuba. Politicians and a handful of civil rights purists may object, but there is little doubt that Reno followed established law—even in sending in overwhelming armed force to seize the child.

Personally, I would fault Reno for one decision: Her approval of the prosecution of Lemrick Nelson on civil rights charges after a state jury acquitted him of the 1991 murder of Yankel Rosenbaum, an Australian visitor, during the Crown Heights riots in Brooklyn. Nelson's acquittal was a miscarriage of justice, but in retrying him on federal charges the Justice Department violated the basic prohibition on subjecting a person to double jeopardy for the same offense. In any case, the public seems overwhelmingly to have approved Nelson's conviction.

Perhaps the public understands these cases better than politicians or editorial writers. After seven years in office, Reno is held in high regard, and her critics, from the Cuban-Americans of Miami to the Republican leaders of Congress, can be heard gnashing their teeth. Overall, Janet Reno has shown the power, in public life, of political independence, plain speech and common sense. ■

# Letter From London

## by D.D. GUTTENPLAN AND MARIA MARGARONIS

Poor Leo Blair. He had scarcely begun to uncrumple his tiny fists when the papers were falling over each other to gloss his political meanings. He's the perfect chaos candidate, crooned the *Sunday Observer*—just what those New Labour control freaks need to remind them that life's unpredictable messiness can be a gift. He's a great reality check, said the leftish *Guardian*: The "Leo effect" could push the government's pathetic childcare policies into fast-forward mode. He's the ideal New Labour babe, approved the *Sun*, the Murdoch tab whose switch from Thatcherite tub-thumping to Blairist pragmatism helped seal the party's 1997 election victory: By naming his son after his own father—a rags-to-riches Tory until 1995—Tony Blair has shown that his heart is firmly in the right place.

Of course, the baby is a PR dream, a symbol of potency, family solidarity, innocence and hope. It's also a PR minefield, with armies of commentators watching the Blairs for the slightest parental misstep. You can bet that Tony's last-minute decision to take limited paternity leave after weeks of will-he won't-he was not prompted by an unexpected surge of affection for his infant son. That bleary, vulnerable, cat-that-ate-the-cream new-dad smile looked real enough, but like rust, a canny politician never sleeps. Warren Hoge's fawning *New York Times* profile may have done wonders for Blair on the Upper West Side; here in London he needs all the help he can get.

The problem is not just the decisive victory of Blair's *bête rouge*, Ken Livingstone, in the London mayoral election last month. Nor is it the threatened closure of the Ford assembly plant in Dagenham, whose owners are pulling the plug because, after three years of New Labour, British workers are still the easiest in Europe to sack. These things are moments in a wider malaise, which has found its metaphor in the stately pleasure dome decreed by the Tories on the Greenwich mud flats, now a costly albatross around New Labour's neck. Meant as a state-of-the-art symbol of New Britain (Blair once said that a visit should give young people an "abiding sense of purpose and unity that stays with them through the rest of their lives"), the Millennium Dome has come to stand for grandiose rhetoric wrapped around hot air—or, worse, recycled Tory plans. While schools and hospitals struggle to make ends meet, it has sucked in £538 million from the National Lottery (a tax on the credulous poor); as the BBC put it, each visitor is now being subsidized to the tune of £70 (more than $100).

In this climate, even the birth brought its share of bad news. Coming as it did between National Work/Life Balance Week and National Childcare Week (has Labour HQ hired some ancient Soviet retainer to think up these festivals?), it was bound to call attention to the government's much-vaunted family poli-

*D.D. Guttenplan and Maria Margaronis, contributing editors to* The Nation, *live in London.*

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cies. Britain has the worst maternity-leave provision in Europe, the longest working hours, the highest divorce rate and the highest teenage pregnancy rate. In spite of mountains of position papers and committee reports produced by legions of well-meaning people, little of substance has been done to address these issues.

This is partly because New Labour started out with a puritanical view of work (Blair's own, perhaps), which assumes that paid employment is the highest good. ("A good mother is a working mother," one government minister was heard to say in those early, heady days.) The emphasis on getting women back on the job produced the New Deal for Lone Parents, which replaced Lone Parent Benefit with a version of workfare meant to push some 900,000 single mothers off state aid. It failed miserably because few women chose to leave their children in badly organized daycare so they could stack shelves at the local Safeway. The mantra now is "work/life balance"—but never, never at the expense of business. The week before the birth of his son, Blair boasted to Britain's captains of industry that they are more lightly regulated even than their US counterparts. Because of this exquisite sensitivity to the needs of corporations, every European measure designed to ease the lot of working families has its teeth extracted before being allowed across the Channel.

*Baby Leo may be keeping the Blairs awake nights, but it is the rebirth of Red Ken that is causing most politicians to lose sleep.*

And so it was that the Prime Minister's wife, four days before giving birth, found herself arguing in court against the government's restriction of a European Union directive that grants thirteen weeks of unpaid—note, unpaid—parental leave to parents of children under 5. The Department of Trade and Industry, she said, "is giving disproportionate stress to the interests of employers while overlooking the more important protection of family life." Plucky Cherie in her voluminous black robe got the media equivalent of a standing ovation. But this carefully staged scene from a modern political marriage sent all sorts of subliminal messages. Was her stand meant to reassure women voters that Tony's all right—either because his wife is comfortable opposing his policies in public, or because he actually agrees with her but hasn't quite managed to talk his ministers round?

With the next general election due before Leo is out of nappies, there is talk of a new gender gap in Westminster's oak and leather halls. Many of the original Blair babes—the 101 women Labour MPs who won their seats at the last election—are bitterly disillusioned. Four have announced that they will not seek re-election because the working hours and culture of the House of Commons are so headbangingly macho. (Attempts to shift this situation have not flourished. In April, for instance, Speaker Betty Boothroyd decided that the ban on refreshments in the House extends to breastfeeding babies.) Meanwhile, Tory leader William Hague has spotted an opening and is busily wooing his new target voter, a middle-income, 33- to 55-year-old mother dubbed Florida Woman because she dreams of holidaying in the Sunshine State.

Boosted by the return of the brainy and charismatic Michael Portillo to their front bench after the death of a soused old Tory war horse, the Conservatives are enjoying a minor populist revival. Their chosen bandwagon is that old favorite, racism and xenophobia, this time hitched to the debate over Labour's treatment of asylum seekers and the recent attacks on white farmers in Zimbabwe. In late May the Labour spin machine spat out a suitable counterblast: a polemic against the "old school tie" elitism of Oxford and Cambridge starring one Laura Spence, a state school student from Tyneside with perfect grades who was rejected by Oxford and is going to Harvard instead. Of course, this is partly a cheap shot. In attacking the (real) elitism of the old universities, New Labour is glossing over its own responsibility for Britain's two-tier education system. But it also reflects a recognition that those Old Labour chestnuts, class and privilege, are not only still with us but still vote winners, too.

Baby Leo may be keeping the Blairs awake nights, but it is the rebirth of Red Ken that is causing the rest of Britain's political establishment to lose sleep. Denied Labour's nomination by a rigged selection ballot (in which the votes of a handful of MPs counted for more than those of thousands of party members), Livingstone ran for mayor of London as an independent. With a twenty-point lead in the polls the strategy wasn't as risky as it looked. But Labour spin doctors lost no time reminding the electorate of Livingstone's broken promise to abide by the selection results—and the campaign got dirtier every day. The lowest blow was probably an ad—paid for by New Labour—blaming the May 1 anticapitalist street protests here on Livingstone's expressions of sympathy for direct action.

Livingstone himself was expelled from the Labour Party, and the threat of further purges kept most unions and Labour activists from offering overt support. There were reports of public-sector workers being "volunteered" to leaflet for the Labour candidate. With seats on school boards and local health-service councils shared out by party activists, Livingstone's supporters inside the Labour Party had plenty of reasons to keep their heads down. But expulsion also freed Livingstone, if not to speak his mind about Tony Blair, toward whom he maintained a stance of wounded loyalty, then at least to forge an alliance with the Green Party, urging his supporters to give its candidates their second preferential vote in the London assembly elections.

The result on May 4 was a complete vindication of Livingstone's strategy—and the blackest day in the history of New Labour, which lost nearly 600 council seats across the country and saw its candidate for London mayor run a humiliating third. Livingstone's 58 percent of the final vote came with coattails long enough to carry three Greens into the new Greater London Assembly, which is otherwise split evenly between Labour and the Tories.

Quoting Churchill's maxim "In victory, magnanimity," the new Mayor pledged to cooperate with Labour—as long as Labour cooperates with him. A hint of what this might mean came in Livingstone's casual remark that he hoped he and the government could resolve their differences over how to finance improvements to the Underground amicably, instead of in court.

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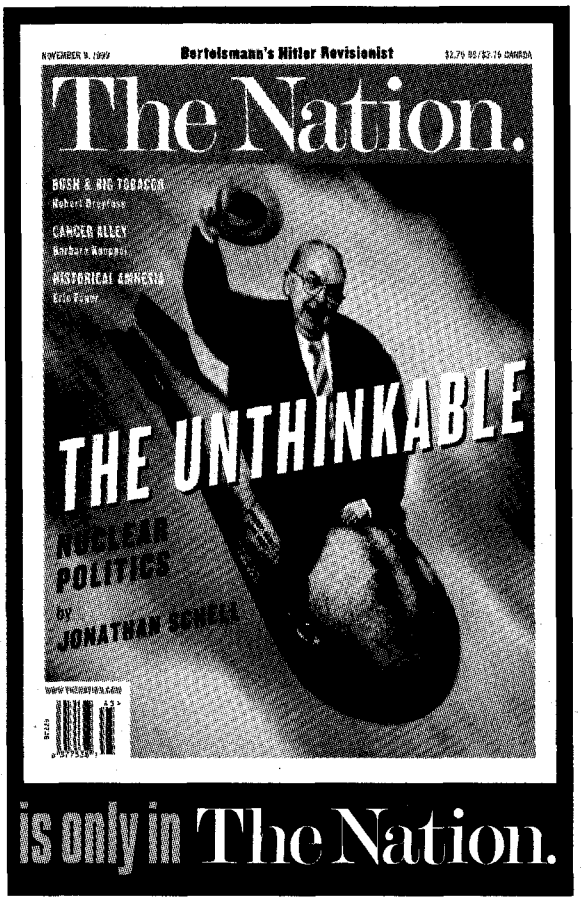


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(Livingstone favors a New York–style bond issue; Labour is pressing for partial privatization.)

His statutory powers may be limited, but even with a 33 percent turnout more people voted for Ken Livingstone than have ever voted for a single politician in British history. That mandate—and Livingstone's willingness to exploit it to the hilt—offers opportunities far beyond the Mayor's brief of public transport, police and urban planning. His victory was only a few hours old when Livingstone made headlines with a call for government intervention to save the jobs of Ford workers at Dagenham, where union leaders say the company has reneged on a promise to invest millions of pounds. And technically, Dagenham isn't even in London.

With his nasal whine, badly cut suits and flair for the popular mood, Livingstone comes across like a younger, left-wing Ed Koch. There is also more than a little of Koch's *la ville, c'est moi* attitude. But analysts who credit Livingstone's cheeky-chappie personality for his victory, or who dismiss his supporters as "rootless, singles-dominated London[ers]" who, in the words of one New Labour apologist, prize "pizazz, rebellion and easy identification with victimhood," are misreading the signs. As former head of the Greater London Council, Livingstone has a record; he also has a constituency. A neighbor of ours—single, working class, over 50—said she voted for Livingstone because when he ran the GLC "they put the fares down for people like me, and if he says he'll do it again I believe him."

Livingstone's victory offers at least the possibility of a radicalism at once popular and populist—and it is that vision that terrifies New Labour. Abandoning even the pretext of egalitarianism, New Labour has always banked on the certainty that given the choice between Blair & Company's wistful, compassionate, wake-up-and-smell-the-cappuccino surrender to the marketplace and something infinitely worse (i.e., the Conservative Party), people would vote Labour. But what if they had another option?

Designed by Labour grandee Richard (now Lord) Rogers, the Millennium Dome is New Labour's monument (lifted wholesale, like Labour's punitive asylum policy, from Tory blueprints). Erected at vast public expense, yet, in the best Third Way fashion, turned over (like failing schools and private prisons) to corporations to outfit and run, the dome was supposed to be the greatest tourist draw in Britain. But as word spread that, having paid their £20, visitors who ventured inside found little more than a hellish succession of business-sponsored "zones," Londoners stayed away in droves.

On any given day you can find them instead a few miles up river, queuing in their hundreds for admission to the Tate Modern, an art gallery fashioned out of what was once the Bankside power station. With its free admission, blatant emphasis on content—at the moment a stunning installation by Louise Bourgeois, along with a permanent collection that ranges from Degas to Damien Hirst—and old-fashioned faith in public space and public edification, the Tate Modern is everything the Millennium Dome is not. The Tate's cavernous Turbine Hall may have a name better suited to some Palace of People's Culture, but the crowds inside—old, young, posh, punk and every color of the rainbow coalition—must make Pierre-Yves Gerbeau, the former Euro-Disney executive recruited to save the dome, feel like Snow White's stepmother.

Politics is about choices. Like the dome, the Tate Modern was built partly with public funds (though with £50 million from the lottery, the government can hardly be accused of throwing money at culture). But the vision behind it—of a public made of more than just "consumers" and of a public purpose that might dare to have aspirations beyond making Britain competitive in the global marketplace—couldn't be more different.

But politics is also about limits. As Mayor of London, Ken Livingstone won't be able to abolish Britain's Upstairs/Downstairs system of education, which offers parents who can pay high standards, small classes—subsidized by massive tax breaks—and an assured place at university for their children, while those who depend on the public sector make do with decaying buildings, crowded classrooms and harried teachers. Livingstone can't stop the rot at the National Health Service, which is sliding down the same road. He probably won't even be able to do much about Dagenham, a dinosaur of industrial production whose 7,000 workers—down from 50,000 in the fifties and sixties, but still the largest manufacturing work force in London—have no place in Tony Blair's BraveNewBritain.com.

What he can do is make noise. And experiment. And give Londoners a greater say in how their city is run. Fiorello La Guardia couldn't do much about the Depression; as a Republican-Socialist, he shouldn't have had much sway in Washington, either. But he did. La Guardia turned New York into a laboratory for measures in public housing, public health and public recreation whose successes were repeated on a state and national scale.

Livingstone's project may fail. He is hedged in by contradictions—what is the Green Party's champion doing fighting for jobs building cars, anyway?—and surrounded by opponents skilled in the arts of spin and lowered expectations. Just winning the election was an achievement—not only for Livingstone but for the forces he gathered around him: old Labour class warriors, new British culture warriors, pensioners scared of the future and young road protesters who want a greener city than the one they were born into. But if he can keep that coalition together, deliver on his promise to revitalize public transport and rebuild that derelict site on the social map once known as the public sphere, he may yet give Leo Blair's dad a chance to spend more time helping out at home. ■

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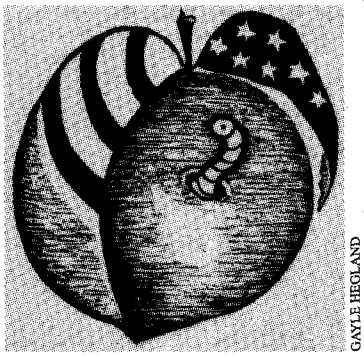
A RAPID INFLUX OF SPANISH-SPEAKING IMMIGRANTS HAS TRANSFORMED A GEORGIA TOWN.

# The Old South's New Face

DAVID L. KIRP

It's Saturday night in the prosperous north Georgia community of Dalton, population 25,000, self-proclaimed "Carpet Capital of the World," and the local Wal-Mart is jammed. Shoppers are pushing their oversized carts down the aisles, stocking up for the week and rummaging for bargains in bins designed to tempt the impulse buyer. There's nothing remarkable in this scene—except that the lingua franca is Spanish, not English, and about half the customers are Latino. That's astonishing in a place not very far from *Deliverance* country, but it accurately reflects how things are in Dalton. A town that used to be known as the place where Marla Maples and Deborah Norville came from now offers a window on America's demographic future.



GAYLE HEGLAND

Virtually overnight, Dalton's population has been remade. The 1990 census reported that 6 percent of the residents were Latino, 10 percent African-American and the rest white. Now the Immigration and Naturalization Service estimates that at least one-third of the population is Hispanic, most of them Mexican—a more than fivefold rise, among the fastest rates of growth anywhere in the nation.

While Hispanic migrant workers have long been an American fixture, this generation behaves very differently. Workers are bringing their families with them, and, more and more, the families are staying. In less than a decade, Hispanics will be the second-largest population group in the United States, a fact that prompts demographers to talk about the "Latinization" of America's heartland—what University of Georgia professor Doug Bachtel describes as "the largest ever sustained mass migration of one group to the United States."

Nowhere is this change more visible than in Georgia, and the reaction has sometimes been nasty. In 1996 the state passed an English-only law. What's more, four Atlanta suburbs in Newt Gingrich/Bob Barr country have adopted ordinances requiring that commercial signs be predominantly in English. The target they have in mind isn't Taco Bell or Delta Airlines, of course, but small Hispanic- and Asian-run businesses. If these newcomers can't be kept out, the logic of bigotry runs, at least they can be kept in their place.

In Dalton, by contrast, the welcome wagon is out. Jobs for immigrants pay a decent wage, the political system has been opened up to embrace newcomers, public services now have bilingual staffs and nearly a hundred Latino businesses, everything from funeral parlors to restaurant chains, are thriving.

Nowhere is the welcome warmer than in the public schools. Prodded by local business leaders, the school district has recruited teachers from Mexico to serve as a cultural bridge, while sending some homegrown teachers to spend summers in Mexico. More ambitious still, the district ultimately hopes to deliver universal bilingual education. It's a startling objective for a conservative Georgia town: Every Dalton high school graduate would be taught in both Spanish and English. But that's a long way off—and so is full community membership for Latino immigrants.

## 'Camina, Por Favor'

During the early nineties, as more and more non–English speaking students arrived in Dalton's public schools, some teachers panicked. If they couldn't even talk to children at the level of "What's your name?" how could they teach them anything? Several instructors decided they'd rather quit than work with Latino youngsters.

Dalton residents have long prided themselves on the quality of their public schools; per-pupil expenditures and test scores are among the highest in the state. The swiftly changing composition of the student body—this year 41 percent is Hispanic—has scared many white parents. Some sent their children to private academies in Chattanooga, about thirty miles away, while others moved to the surrounding county, where fewer Hispanics live. They needn't have worried. Achievement-test scores have remained high, and Dalton's strategy for educating students who don't speak English has put the town on the national map. In education circles, "Dalton=Progressivism."

At Roan Elementary School, where 79 percent of the kindergarten-through-second-grade students come from Spanish-speaking homes, scarcely a week goes by without a visit from a US senator's aide, a state Board of Education member or a reporter from the national media. Awards from education organizations festoon principal Frankie Beard's walls. The hosannas are richly deserved. Roan's experience shows that children who come to school without knowing any English can quickly flourish in two languages.

"Walk, don't run," Frankie Beard tells her students while we are pacing the corridors of the school, and in her recently acquired, Mississippi-inflected Spanish, she adds, "*Camina, por favor.*" At Roan, every student is taught in both Spanish and English; some students participate in a full-time, two-way bilingual program.

Educators would label these children "at risk" students, but their academic performance says otherwise. By the end of the

*David L. Kirp, professor of public policy at the Goldman School of Public Policy, University of California, Berkeley, and a regular contributor to* The Nation, *is the author of* Almost Home: America's Love-Hate Relationship With Community, *which will be published this month by Princeton University Press.*

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second grade, roughly six in ten students are performing at or above grade level. What I saw while visiting classrooms and talking to students suggests that these numbers translate into feats of learning. At one table in a second-grade classroom, a boy who came to Dalton speaking no English just a year earlier is dissecting a complicated story in English, while at the next table a blond girl is reading an image-rich poem in flawless Spanish, then explaining what the poem means.

The national debate over the effectiveness of bilingual education versus English-language immersion has continued nonstop since the sixties, when bilingual instruction was widely introduced in the public schools. Although there are thousands of evaluations of specific programs, a recent National Research Council report criticizes many as partisan and almost all of them as worthless. There is still no solid answer to the question: Does bilingual education help or hurt limited-English-speaking youngsters? Although the issue is typically framed in the polite language of pedagogy, bilingualism has been politicized almost beyond redemption. Antagonists see bilingual education as identity politics in pedagogical drag, while multiculturalists decry the "hegemonic" idea of assimilation that they equate with English-immersion courses.

*There is a dawning recognition that Latino students, far from being a burden, are preparing classmates for the world beyond Dalton.*

Such rhetorical thrust and parry makes fine sport for intellectuals and provides a decent living for researchers, but it has little to do with what's going on in classrooms. As the National Research Council report concludes, there cannot be a one size fits all answer, since different teaching methods work best in different communities, with their distinctive needs and resources.

Dalton is a case in point. Its pragmatic approach—take advantage of what works right now for a particular child, in whatever language and with whatever technique makes sense—defies neat categories. The experiment in two-way bilingual instruction, something that a handful of districts across the country are now trying, should be appreciated in similarly pragmatic terms. In the pedagogical-cum-ideological fray, Dalton's educators belong to no camp. "We use every minute of instructional time," says Beard. "There's always some interchange taking place."

The complex array of teaching strategies deployed at Roan—one-on-one, small-group and whole-class instruction; classes taught in English, Spanish or a combination of the two languages; standard US materials and readers imported from Mexico; math one day and *matemáticas* the next—didn't emerge overnight. The school district searched for qualified bilingual instructors, but nationally they are in short supply, and while it recruited Spanish-speaking teachers' aides, most of them had only a high school education. Something more needed to be done. "We visited model schools throughout the country," says Frankie Beard, "came back, digested what we had seen and decided that this was the route we wanted to take with our children."

Defining that route is a locally devised program called Project Georgia. Each year the project, now in its fourth year, recruits about fifteen teachers from Mexico's Monterrey University; approximately the same number of Dalton teachers spend the summer taking intensive Spanish language and culture classes.

The young Mexican teachers do more than speak both languages. They also maneuver between two cultures. "When a teenage girl is trying to figure what it means to 'date,'" a counselor tells me, "or when parents don't understand that they have to send their children to school, there's someone whom they can talk to."

Project Georgia is the brainchild and preoccupying passion of Erwin Mitchell, a septuagenarian lawyer sufficiently nimble to have gotten Bert Lance acquitted on charges of bank fraud, and a Congressman sufficiently principled to have opposed the hard-line segregationists in the fifties. Mitchell's daughter was one of the demoralized teachers at Roan, and what he heard and saw at the school moved him to action. He prodded the state Board of Education, which at the time had no expertise with educating non-English-speakers, and then he looked closer to home. Mitchell is a rainmaker—a "weaver of influence," school Superintendent Billy Bice calls him—and he ultimately used his contacts in the local carpet industry to make the Monterrey connection. Bob Shaw, CEO of giant Shaw Carpet, introduced Mitchell to a Mexican business colleague, and the plan to bring Mexico to Georgia was launched.

"This is the way of the future," says Mitchell. "The growth of our community is going to be Hispanic, and not Anglo or white." That means "the aim of our school system is to make it possible for every student to become bilingual by the time of graduation."

By all accounts, Project Georgia is a success. One validation comes from its having been named a semifinalist in the Harvard-sponsored "National Innovations in American Government" competition. More important are the academic success stories and the shift in the school climate—the dawning recognition that these newcomers, far from being a burden, are actually preparing their classmates for the world beyond Dalton.

## Why Dalton Is Different

One Saturday in the spring of last year, the Ku Klux Klan organized a rally against "the illegals" on the courthouse steps of a town a few miles from Dalton. The Klan even tried to enlist African-Americans, who constitute about 4 percent of the region's population, in their new crusade, but no one was interested.

Dalton has also known its xenophobic moments. In the mid-nineties, when residents became aware of the rapid influx of Hispanics, some wore "English Only" T-shirts, and angry whites launched an organization called Citizens Against Illegal Aliens. They complained about pigs being slaughtered in the front yards of noisy and overcrowded houses, drunk drivers turning their streets into obstacle courses and graffiti defacing their storefronts. They flooded the town newspaper with letters in which being "proud of my race" and my "American-made husband" figured prominently. "Why should we have to accommodate Hispanics by changing our traditions? In the next few years, it will be more like we are living in Mexico than Hispanics are living in America," one letter writer complained, and another demanded the death penalty for illegal immigrants.

The anti-immigrant group had enough political juice to convince the INS to take part in a joint police department/INS task

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force in Dalton, one of the few such units in the nation. But that two-officer unit doesn't spend much time deporting illegal immigrants. Instead—"overwhelmed by numbers," says Capt. Terry Neal—it sees its mission as reducing crime. These days, Citizens Against Illegal Aliens is a spent force. There haven't been many "incidents" in the past few years, its organizer acknowledges—indeed, no one quite remembers when the group last met.

As the Project Georgia story suggests, Dalton has done much more than keep the peace. Within the limits fixed by US immigration law, it has begun to remake itself.

Prosperity is an important, though partial, explanation for the town's willingness to change. Dalton really is the "Carpet Capital of the World"—1.7 billion square yards of carpet with a retail value of $15.7 million, three-quarters of all the carpet made in the United States, is manufactured in the vicinity. As the industry—Carpet, as everyone in Dalton calls it—has grown, the town has profited. The 3.3 percent jobless rate is among the lowest in Georgia. Residents boast that there are more millionaires per capita living in Dalton than anywhere else in the United States. While that claim is surely untrue, what matters is the myth: Dalton=Money.

Over the past decade, Carpet has needed ever more workers. Mexican immigrants, drawn by the $10-plus-an-hour wages and the town's reputation for *tranquilidad*, filled the void. "It doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out why they're here," says Mayor James Middleton. "We need them." Since there are more jobs than takers, the livelihood of longtime residents hasn't been threatened. Plant supervisors were initially anxious about the language barrier, but the newcomers' work ethic changed their minds. New stereotypes have replaced the old. "I love my Mexicans," declared one mill manager in a local magazine. "They go out there and run their jobs. They're loyal. The white people are just the opposite. They bounce around. These Hispanics are helping us out."

But the fact of Dalton's prosperity doesn't explain everything: Were it otherwise, California would be heaven for Latino immigrants, rather than a place so xenophobic that it might as well occupy another political planet. The social uses to which that prosperity has been put, the vision of the politicians and executives from Carpet who effectively run the town, matter greatly.

Nationwide corporations like Con-Agra, a chicken-rendering giant that operates a plant in Dalton, have a reputation for treating their workers shabbily [see David Bacon, "INS Declares War on Labor," October 25, 1999]. By contrast, the Dalton carpet mills, many of which remain locally owned, have acted on the principle of enlightened self-interest. More than sixty Mexican soccer teams play on fields paid for by Carpet. Over the years, Carpet established a multimillion-dollar endowment for the local hospital, paid for new parks and helped underwrite the cost of building a new high school. One Carpet CEO is the biggest backer of a new and heavily Latino Catholic church, which has the largest congregation outside Atlanta.

Social stability has long been Dalton's watchword. When the public schools were desegregated in the late sixties, the word came down from the powers that be in Carpet that there shouldn't be any trouble, and the transition was managed as easily as any place in the South. So too with immigration. When Citizens Against Illegal Aliens started to agitate, Mayor Middleton says, "we got the message around that only a very, very small percentage of Mexicans—or blacks and whites—are bad." Middleton appointed the leader of the anti-immigrant group to a 140-member task force, "so that I could control her."

"When you write about Dalton, be sure to say nice things about us," pleaded Norberto Reyes, owner of the Los Reyes chain of restaurants in Dalton. "Us" is the key: To Reyes, Dalton is "our town." Until recently, politics wasn't on the radar screen for Dalton's Latinos, many of whom aren't eligible to vote. But the Dalton political establishment realized early on that its future, and the town's social equilibrium, depended on maintaining a policy of inclusion. Rather than resist change, they have nurtured a Hispanic organization whose chief mission is to register new voters. Middleton predicts that the next mayor, or surely the mayor after that, will be Latino. It will likely be someone who understands the folkways of Dalton.

## The Mouse in the Box

Dalton isn't paradise for the new migrants. Some concerns—better housing, a less status-driven high school—can be confronted within the city limits. The political fight over Project Georgia is a case in point. Despite its successes, two-way bilingual education in Dalton remains a work in progress and a program under siege. Last year Superintendent Billy Bice, miffed because the Georgia Project was the brainchild of outsiders, tried to dismantle it. The project is too expensive, Bice claimed, even though much of its support comes from outside sources and the Dalton school budget has a multimillion-dollar surplus. In its place, Bice proposed offering non-English-speakers just a single year of English immersion classes—shades of California's Proposition 227. Bice failed (Erwin Mitchell knows something about lobbying), but the attempt shows where the school chief places the project on his priorities list. If the Georgia Project is really going to make two-way bilingualism a reality, it needs to be expanded, not cut back. The school district is heading in the right direction: This spring, it gave permanent jobs to three of the project's Mexican alumnae.

Unlike the youngsters at Roan, the Latino high school students I spoke with are bitter about their lives. Understandably so. On the ramp at Dalton High, the physical center of the school and its social hub, whites congregate at the top of the ramp and blacks at the bottom. Latinos stand hesitantly to the side or else avoid the ramp entirely. "It's the mill owners' children and the mill workers' children," said a school counselor matter-of-factly, explaining why there is so little contact across the ethnic divide.

Most of the problems facing Dalton's newest residents, however, cannot be addressed locally, because no single community can determine what "*E Pluribus Unum*" means in these times. The INS casts a pall over their lives. Even though the joint INS/police task force doesn't focus on deportation, the INS itself still conducts occasional raids, sending workers scurrying to safety and confirming Latino residents in their insecurity. But perhaps more important, many of the students don't have much of a future because of US immigration policy.

"Sometimes I feel like a mouse in a box," a high school senior told me. "I can do some things, but because of my illegal status there's only so far I can go before I run into a wall."

Children born in Mexico who move with their parents to Dalton can get a solid education. If they perform well academically

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they are eligible for a state Hope Scholarship, which pays their college tuition. But—Catch-22—they can't enroll in a Georgia public university unless they are legal residents. If they press their case they risk being jailed or deported. Nor can they readily return to Mexico for college, since universities there favor graduates of Mexican high schools.

What's left for these adolescents are the same kinds of jobs their parents have—and a bitter feeling of having been sucker-punched. They are the casualties of what Mexico's Atlanta-based consul general, Teodoro Maus, decries as "scholastic apartheid." For this generation, the take-home lesson is that the promised opportunity is a sham; that what they have learned doesn't matter; that, like their parents, they are valued only for their willingness to do work that no one else, no "real American," will touch.

"Everything they told us," says one of the high school students, a Latino Holden Caulfield, "was a lie."

Unless the next generation can anticipate a future where minds matter as much as muscle, Dalton, despite its well-paying jobs and soccer fields and bilingual good deeds, will simply be a place that treats its servants nicely. And unless US immigration legislation is rewritten to acknowledge the need for empathy and nondiscrimination, national policy will amount to nothing more than prettied-up economic exploitation—testament to the fact that the United States is not a social compact, just an economy. In Dalton and elsewhere, those who believe they have a chance of changing their lives will find out that they are disposable people, guest workers who, like the guests at any party, will be ushered out the door once the festivities have ended. ■

## EXCHANGE
CONTINUED

(Continued From Page 2)
difficult days, Pacifica's top priority must not be to grow, but to protect its soul. By patiently continuing its prickly, activist programming, it will strengthen the left and ultimately itself as well. Organizing takes time. Arbitron ratings are meaningless. When the national progressive movement crests again, millions of people will seek an alternative radio voice. If Pacifica has been reduced to an "edgy NPR," the movement will have been robbed of a valuable organizing tool, and we will never again see a truly oppositional national radio network. BRUCE SOLOWAY

*Brooklyn, N.Y.*

■ Dinges is right: It's all about the audience. But the mistake Pacifica made was signing up with Arbitron. Success in the Arbs means holding an easily delineable demographic for a length of time—this shows how well a station delivers consumers to advertisers. But that needn't be the only measure of success. Pubcasters around the world have used the idea of "reach" for decades: how many different people from different communities tune you in (if only for a few minutes) during a week. That marketeers with a pecuniary interest in streamlined radio format (like David Giovannoni) and those hypnotized by them (like Dinges) see a "horror show" in Pacifica's patchwork should be irrelevant to anyone with a noncommercial view of quality (especially "community") radio. MARTIN SPINELLI
*Assistant professor of radio*
*Brooklyn College, CUNY*

*San Francisco*

■ I broke my self-imposed gag rule with regard to giving interviews to the print media by speaking with John Dinges some months ago. My hope was that an in-depth, fair and honest deconstruction of the underlying issues that brought the Pacifica crisis to a head would be presented to the *Nation* audience.

I was severely disappointed. Rather than examine how and why a centralized hierarchy was foisted upon the stations long before the Corporation for Public Broadcasting pulled the chain; rather than investigate the cronyism, incompetence and arrogance at the management and governance levels; rather than probe the aggrandizement of an ineffectual national bureaucracy at the expense of the stations, subscribers and national programming; rather than question the abandonment by its leadership of the noble mission of Pacifica, with no new vision except that of "growing audience"; Dinges prefers to see the demise of a fifty-one-year-old public trust as a modernists-versus-sandbox-bullies squabble.

While "audience" (or, more accurately, audience numbers as measured by Arbitron) is definitely at the center of the paradigm shift in public radio—birthing a plethora of consultants and their cottage industries—it is not at the center of the conflict at Pacifica. Granted, the pressure put on Pacifica by CPB's change in funding criteria—four out of five stations did not make the criteria until they were ranked as minority stations—was audience-related, giving management the excuse to make "necessary" changes. But again, it is not at the center of the conflict. If it were, I would not have been rudely dismissed with two hours to "get [my] things out."

Unlike Mary Frances Berry, I did not enter Pacifica with "impeccable progressive credentials." I entered as an independent-thinking, articulate and seasoned public radio broadcaster with a vision for programming—local, national and global—a knack for community-building and fundraising, a reputation as an outspoken advocate for diversity, a sense of humor and an inclusive management style. I became enamored with the KPFA and Pacifica radio legacy. I was passionate about grooming and empowering the next generation of KPFA and Pacifica broadcasters, knowing that by doing so we would also be grooming the next generation of listeners and subscribers. And I was determined to bring KPFA into digital broadcasting. But vision, leadership and passion can be very threatening attributes to those with covert agendas.

I did not gain the respect and trust of staff, listeners and donors by standing up to my new boss, as Dinges says, or "dissing the board to donors." I didn't have to, because the emperors had no clothes on, and everyone knew it. I was told that I was "not a good fit for the organization," *not* "not a team player," as the article states. That mis-fact alone speaks volumes to me of whose version of events Dinges listened to and why. To frame the struggle as an audience debate, to reduce the heartfelt outcry of thousands to a playpen pissing match without acknowledging the other operating paradigms is wrong.

The systemic problems remain despite the new dawn/new day spin of the leadership. In April there were thousands of activists in the streets of Washington, but not a peep from Pacifica, which has not only a DC station but the *Pacifica Network News* there as well—and the Pacifica national office, stealthily moved there one night after fifty years on the West Coast. How tragic. NICOLE SAWAYA

### DINGES REPLIES

*Washington, D.C.*

■ I had my say on most of these issues in my article, so I won't try to have the last word. On the charge of bias, I can only say that I reported the story as thoroughly and fairly as I could and gave readers my best and most honest analysis based on the facts and my experience in public radio.

The debate over audience growth and political content will surely continue among the Pacifica stations, as it must. But it is self-defeating to frame that argument—as some letters do—on the unexamined assumption that all successful audience growth (such as that at the Houston, Washington and Los Angeles stations) must by definition have been achieved by "watering down" core Pacifica political content. I did not find that to be true in my comparison of the programming schedules of all five stations. Each has a different mix of political, nonpolitical and music programming, and all devote at least an hour and a half to Pacifica's trademark national programs, *Democracy Now!* and *Pacifica Network News*. Others may reach a different conclusion—and that is the point of an open debate. JOHN DINGES

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BOOKS & THE ARTS

# 'Spies' Under the Persian Rug

MANSOUR FARHANG

**TORTURED CONFESSIONS: Prisons and Public Recantations in Modern Iran.**
By Ervand Abrahamian.
California. 279 pp. $45. Paper $16.95.

Early in the morning on Tuesday, May 2, as I opened my apartment door to pick up the *New York Times*, I was struck by a large front-page picture of a man in Iranian prison uniform. The caption below the picture identified the prisoner as "Hamid Tefileen, a shoe salesman who is one of thirteen Jewish men accused of spying for Israel." The picture accompanied an article that conveyed the claim of Iran's judicial authorities that Tefileen had "confessed" to his crime. The tormented face of the prisoner reminded me of numerous such pictures I have seen in the Iranian press over the past thirty years, none of which found their way to the pages of the *Times* or other newspapers of record.

International human rights organizations are pleased that at long last the Western mass media have chosen to expose the nature of the "confessions" used as evidence in Iran's judicial system. Yet an elegantly written and fully documented book on the history of prisons, torture, confession and public recantation in modern Iran is available to tell us that, too. The writer, Ervand Abrahamian, is a professor of history at Baruch College, City University of New York, and his handful of books on twentieth-century Iran constitute an indispensable source of information, insight and analysis for scholars and general readers as well. Abrahamian's latest book provides a context in which the Kafkaesque and Orwellian character of the "confessions" obtained in the trial of the Jews in Shiraz can be adequately comprehended.

Torture as a tool of government policy was banned in Iran when Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi launched his modernization drive in the early sixties. Abrahamian dates the return of torture to Iran's judicial process to 1971 and notes that this development ran counter to Michel Foucault's view that societies tend to replace physical with non-physical punishment as they move from tradition to modernity. This was the time when a new generation of leftist Iranians, having witnessed the decimation of non-violent dissidents, chose the path of armed rebellion against the Pahlavi monarchy. As this struggle gained momentum and the guerrillas, both Marxists and Muslims, became the young generation's folk heroes, the Shah's regime expanded the SAVAK (Iran's security organization before the 1979 revolution) and modernized the prisons to handle the new breed of activist dissident. Evin, Iran's Bastille, was originally built to house 320 inmates with twenty solitary cells. By the late seventies it had been expanded to accommodate 1,500 inmates with 100 solitary cells. Six interrogation chambers were arranged in the prison basement, and SAVAK was given "a loose leash to torture suspected guerrillas" to obtain information and confessions. Under these circumstances, "torture increased dramatically—in scope, intensity, variety, and sophistication."

*The daily broadcasting of 'confessions' represents an escalation of the Islamic Republic's war against its Jewish and Bahai minorities.*

The Shah's regime sent some of its interrogators abroad for "'scientific' training to prevent unwanted deaths." As Abrahamian writes:

> Brute force was supplemented with the bastinado; sleep deprivation; extensive solitary confinement; glaring searchlights; standing in one place for hours on end; nail extractions; snakes (favored for use with women); electrical shocks with cattle prods, often into the rectum; cigarette burns; sitting on hot grills; acid

*Mansour Farhang, a professor of politics at Bennington College, writes frequently on Iran and is the author of* U.S. Imperialism *(South End) and other works.*

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dripped into nostrils; near-drownings; mock executions; and an electric chair with a large metal mask to muffle screams while amplifying them for the victim. This latter contraption was dubbed the Apollo—an allusion to the American space capsules. Prisoners were also humiliated by being raped, urinated on, and forced to stand naked.

Abrahamian illustrates how the use of recantation by well-known political prisoners came to complicate the plight of the victims. Those who divulged information or recanted rarely said anything about what had actually happened to them. To do so would have meant "admitting" submission, which, in turn, meant losing self-respect and public reputation. For in "this age of revolutionary martyrdom, true heroes were supposed to die rather than submit and compromise their beliefs." Abrahamian has interviewed a number of such people, and his findings show the terrifying reality of what the victims had to go through both before and after their release from prison. Ghulam-Hossein Sa'edi, a gifted playwright and psychiatrist, was one prominent intellectual to be tortured into recanting. He appeared on television in 1975 "to take the political opposition to task for 'exploiting' his works, serving as 'tools of foreign powers,' misunderstanding the country's culture, and refusing to credit the glorious achievements of the Shah-People's revolution." In a 1984 interview in Paris Sa'edi "revealed for the first time how he had been kidnapped, taken to Evin, and subjected to days of 'nightmarish tortures'—all for the purpose of extracting an 'interview.' The interrogator admitted that he wanted Sa'edi to be publicly humiliated because mere imprisonment would make him into a public hero—a mistake made with previous writers."

The 1978–79 revolution promised to end Iran's lawlessness and political repression, but only days after the fall of the Shah a new group of Iranians began to suffer violent treatment at the hands of the new rulers. The jailers and the jailed had switched positions, and the new men of power, intoxicated with self-righteousness, had no need for information or recantation from their former oppressors. Thus for the first twenty-eight months of their rule the Islamic authorities abandoned the practice of interrogation and replaced it with execution of political prisoners without asking too many questions. The hurriedly established Revolutionary Tribunals executed 757 people for "sowing corruption on earth." Most of the victims were prominent royalists and SAVAK officials, but they also included thirty-five Bahais and a leading Jewish businessman. The Islamic judges, all appointed by Ayatollah Khomeini,

limited trials to brief hours, sometimes minutes; found defendants guilty on the basis of "popular repute"; and dismissed the concept of defense attorney as a "Western absurdity." They also explained that the term "sowing corruption on earth" covered a host of sins—"insulting Islam and the clergy," "opposing the Islamic Revolution," "supporting the Pahlavis," and "undermining Iran's independence...." No time was wasted between trial and execution. Most executions were by firing squad. The first took place on the roof of a girls' school where Khomeini had taken up residence on his arrival in Tehran.

*'In previous years, they wanted us to confess to spying,' said one inmate, '[but] in 1998, they wanted us to convert to Islam.'*

Revenge ruled the day, and only the provisional Prime Minister, Mehdi Bazargan, and a number of liberal politicians and intellectuals objected to the killings and violations of law. Most Marxist and Islamist groups called for more and speedier execution of former officials.

The time finally came for the Iranian revolution to devour its children. In June 1981, the attempt of the Mojahedin, an Islamist-Marxist party, to overthrow the regime by force "set off waves of repression unprecedented in Iranian history." Within six months of the failure of the Mojahedin uprising, *Tortured Confessions* reports, the Revolutionary Tribunals executed 2,665 political prisoners—seven times the number of royalists killed in the previous sixteen months. The executions totaled 7,943 by June 1985. Most of these victims belonged to the Mojahedin and the rest to a number of Marxist, Maoist, socialist and liberal groups. As Abrahamian's meticulous research reveals, the overwhelming majority of those executed in the eighties were high school and college students or recent high school and college graduates. Women constituted some 12 percent of the victims. In her deeply moving and revealing prison memoirs, Shahrnush Parsipour, a prominent novelist who was imprisoned for four and a half years for carrying "subversive literature" in her car, estimated that "in late 1981 the average age of her ward mates was nineteen and a half. She also estimates that 80 percent were high school pupils, 15 percent were university students."

The prosecutor of Teheran in the post-revolutionary period, Assadollah Ladjevardi, was a famous prisoner at Evin in the seventies. The first revolutionary warden of Evin, Mohammad Kachouyi, was also an inmate during the Shah's rule. Both men were appointed to their position by Ayatollah Khomeini. When Kachouyi was assassinated in 1981, Khomeini asked Ladjevardi to replace him as the warden of Evin while keeping his job as Teheran's prosecutor. Soon after, Ladjevardi made Evin his family residence and became notorious as the "Butcher of Evin." He was assassinated in 1998. In the panic days of 1981 and the summary execution of young demonstrators, the Islamic rulers were desperate to get information about the identities and whereabouts of those who posed a threat to them. Thus it became a central objective of the state to obtain confessions and recantations from political prisoners. It was also at this point that the idea of converting the political prisoners, by whatever means, to "true Islam" appealed to the authorities. As one former prisoner explained, "The regime had one overriding aim from the moment it arrested us. It was to force us to reject our beliefs and show that its lashes were stronger than our ideals." Another prisoner, a survivor of both pre- and postrevolutionary incarceration, suggests that "the new wardens were determined to extract recantations because they themselves in the 1970's had submitted to the Shah their own 'dishonorable letters of regret.'"

*Ta'zir*, or discretionary punishment, is a feature in Islamic law. In 1980 the first Parliament of the Islamic Republic codified this provision of Islamic law by passing a bill giving judges permission to mete out seventy-four lashes to those who, among other things, kiss illicitly, fail to dress properly or lie to the authorities. As Abrahamian observes, "Clerical interrogators can give indefinite series of seventy-four lashings until they obtain 'honest answers.'" Therefore, if answers "are not satisfactory, they can be lawfully whipped for 'lying.' In theory, this punishment should come after a proper law court has found them guilty of perjury. But the line between interrogation and trial is hazy as the same clerics wear three different turbans—prosecutor, judge, and interrogator. According to the new law,

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interrogators with proper theological credentials are entitled to lash until the guilty 'confess the truth.'"

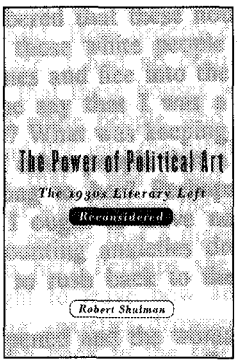
The Constitution of the Islamic Republic forbids torture and coerced confession, but *ta'zir* law allows both physical punishment and voluntary confession. As Abrahamian notes, "The new regime has often told UN delegations that ta'zir should not be equated with torture because it is sanctioned by the sharia and administered by qualified magistrates." Ladjevardi went so far as "to boast that the Islamic Republic is the very first state in history to have converted prisons into universities." He had not been informed, Abrahamian remarks, "that on the eve of the Moscow trials, Vyshinsky, Stalin's chief prosecutor, had published with much fanfare a scholarly treatise entitled From Prisons to Educational Institutions."

At the end of the Iran-Iraq war (1980–88) Ayatollah Khomeini issued a secret religious decree setting up special commissions with instructions to execute all political prisoners who were not clearly repentant. These victims were largely Mojaheds, categorized as moharebs (those who war against God), and leftists, labeled as mortads (apostates from Islam). The commissions questioned prisoners throughout the country to decide which ones should receive the death penalty. The proceedings began with assurances to the prisoners that the purpose of the undertaking was to initiate a general amnesty. Then the commission members asked the prisoners about "their organizational affiliation. If they replied 'Mojahedin,' the questioning ended there. If they replied 'monafeqin' (hypocrites), the commission continued with such questions as 'Are you willing to denounce former colleagues?' 'Are you willing to help us hunt them down?' 'Will you identify phony repenters?' 'Will you go to the war front and walk through enemy minefields?'" In most cases, the prisoners were blindfolded throughout the proceedings. The leftists were asked, "Are you a Muslim? Do you believe in God? Is the Holy Koran the word of God? Will you publicly recant historical materialism? Do you pray and read the Holy Koran?"

These questions bewildered the prisoners because they had never been raised before in Iranian courts. As one leftist inmate put it, "In previous years, they wanted us to confess to spying. In 1988, they wanted us to convert to Islam." The inquisition of the special commissions produced unprecedented violence in Iranian history. "It even outdid," notes Abrahamian, "the 1979 reign of terror. The curtain of secrecy, however, was so effective that no Western journalist heard of it and no Western academic discussed it." Indeed, Abrahamian's work is the only thorough report published on the mass executions of 1988. Former prisoners and opposition groups put the death toll between 5,000 and 6,000. Amnesty International estimates the total to be more than 2,500, the vast majority "'prisoners of conscience' as they had not been charged with actual deeds or plans of deeds against the state." Abrahamian provides an insightful portrayal of how and why medieval inquisition reappeared in modern Iran. Evidence leads him to conclude that the horrors of 1988 were "the product, not of fearful panic, but of calculated planning."

In the late eighties the confession/recantation television shows, publicized as voluntary interviews, lost their impact. Testimonies of survivors, publication of prison memoirs outside the country and the work of international human rights organizations had gradually exposed the truth of the interviews. This made them ineffective, even counterproductive, in demoralizing the opposition through the portrayal of political prisoners as repentant traitors. Thus the re-


CULTURAL TRUTHS

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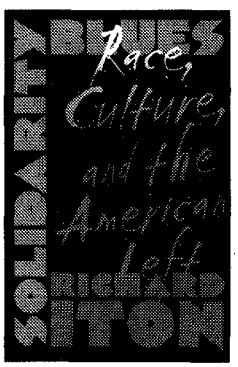


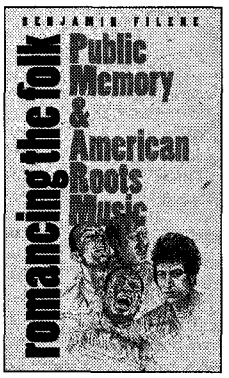


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gime decided to stop broadcasting the "confessions." To be sure, repression remained intact. "Jewish and Bahai leaders continued to be shot as 'foreign spies.' Exiled politicians were increasingly assassinated. Dissidents inside Iran began to 'disappear,' die suddenly of 'natural causes' and be targeted by government propaganda." A 1994 UN report on the human rights situation estimated that there were more than 19,000 political prisoners. Moreover, Amnesty International noted that the use of torture to obtain confessions and recantations returned by the mid-nineties. The same type of "interview" was videotaped as in the past, but it was "now used solely for internal consumption—especially for trials held in camera. Like Stalinist Russia after 1939, the regime ceased broadcasting such confessions but continued to use them in closed trials. The judicial system had routinized forced confessions." Ironically, the "modern" Shah introduced the use of torture as a tool of state policy, and his successor, a "medieval" ayatollah, expanded the practice and made it more systematic. Greater accessibility to television for the general population and enhanced videotape technology enabled the "medievalists" to employ the technique more effectively than their "modernist" predecessors.

In the current Jewish spy trial in Shiraz, Iran's judicial authorities have attempted to portray the case with a nuance that could confuse the naïve or uninformed observer. Eight of the accused have "confessed" their guilt, four have pleaded innocent and one accepts responsibility for passing information to Israel but does not believe his action amounts to espionage. Three are out on bail. The trial ended May 30, and the case went to the prosecution, which is led by the trial judge. It is possible that not all the "confessors" were physically tortured, and even those who were may no longer carry the wounds of abuse. After all, the accused were not allowed to choose their lawyers and were denied visitation rights. The terror of being threatened with death or torture, particularly for members of religious minorities in a theocratic state, is sufficient to make the isolated victims willing to confess to whatever the authorities wish. As Abrahamian's interviews with the survivors or Iran's torture chambers show, we will not know exactly how the Islamic Republic's interrogators tormented the accused Jews until they are free and secure to tell their own stories.

Nine Muslims are also accused of taking part in the alleged ring. The Muslims have yet to be named publicly, but the Jewish defendants have spent more than a year in solitary confinement without access to counsel or significant contact with relatives. One of them, Shahrokh Paknahad, a rabbi, has said that his work "consisted of looking for new members [to join the spy ring] and organizing subversive activities.... We got our information through Jewish people who are close to Muslims." The rabbi has also "confessed" that he "persuaded Jewish youth to avoid military service during the Iran-Iraq war." Equally sensitive was his collection of "information from the air raid shelters" in the days of Iraqi bombing of Iranian cities, to pass on "to the Iraqi regime via Israel." To prove that he made these statements voluntarily, Paknahad concluded his televised "confessions" with a touch of Orwellian surrealism:

> We can see that currently there are about 4 million Muslims living in France, but they do not have a representative in the French parliament. Whereas there are 30,000 of us, members of the Jewish minority, in Iran. The Islamic Republic of Iran's Constitution has said that we should have one deputy in the Majlis. In view of the fact that only one deputy can go to the Majlis for every 250,000 people in the country, we are privileged to have a seat in the Majlis.

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Under the bizarre justice system of the Islamic Republic, convictions of the accused are primarily based not on evidence but on confessions. Thus the use of torture as a tool to obtain confession is built into the very structure of the theocratic order. Therefore, it is quite logical that the presiding judge in the trial also functions as the prosecutor. In the current case of the thirteen Jews, the single court-appointed lawyer for the accused, Esmail Nasseri, revealed to the press that no confidential material was presented in the trial but then he went on to suggest, reportedly with a straight face, that "our defense is that these suspects are not spies but they have collaborated with a foreign power. Their sentence cannot exceed 2–10 years in prison." In defending another member of the group, Ramin Farzam, a 35-year-old perfumer in Teheran who has "confessed" to "indirect espionage," Nasseri said, "It can't be said he respected his country, but he was not a spy."

After nearly a decade of refraining from broadcasting confession/recantation shows, the propagandists of Iran's state-controlled television were back at work with their Jewish victims. Every day the court was in session the terrified defendants, as they were led by armed guards from the courtroom to jail, paused near the press corps gathered outside to inform the world that they were not under duress. Iran's hard-line clerics seem to have assumed that anti-Jewish and anti-Israeli sentiment among rival factions of the regime was strong enough to make the trial popular. But the reports of international journalists and observers leave no doubt that most Iranians see the absurdity of the charade and view the "confessions" with contempt.

It is all but evident that the trial, which is closed to the press and independent observers, is being used as a tool of state policy; the daily broadcasting of the defendants' "confessions" represents an escalation of the Islamic Republic's psychological war against the country's Jewish and Bahai minorities. The trial is also part of a drive by the hard-line clerics to exacerbate tensions with Israel and the United States and frustrate President Mohammad Khatami's efforts to improve Iran's relations with the West. Abrahamian's research was completed before the spy case became public, but if he ever has the opportunity to do a second edition of his superb book, he should consider presenting the "confessions" of the accused Jews in Shiraz as an illustration of how absurd the Iranian theocracy can become in using confession as a tool of political repression. ■

# Prince Albert in a Can

DAVID CORN

**INVENTING AL GORE.** By Bill Turque. Houghton Mifflin. 448 pp. $25.

What's the *meaning* of Al Gore? Or George Bush? No matter which name brand ends up occupying the master suite of 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, it will be tough to conjure up the appropriate high concept with which to peg him. The Frat-Boy President (son of George)? The Student-Body President (son of Albert)? Either tag is small-scale when compared with the grand labels that can be applied to our previous top dogs: the Glam Prince for a Modern Age, the Paranoid Champion of Middle-American Resentment, the All-American Boy Who Could Play the Part, the Yuppie Generation's Know-It-All. As public figures, neither aspirant Gore nor aspirant Bush seems to symbolize, embody or otherwise represent an age, a social moment, a cultural shift or a significant slice of the population. (No, Ivy League sons of famous, powerful men do not count as a demographic cohort.)

With *Inventing Al Gore*, Bill Turque, a correspondent for *Newsweek*, presents a straightforward and occasionally engaging biography of the Vice President, a book that has more heft than the slapdash campaign bios that often pop out of reporters' notebooks in election years. But Turque's book is no life-and-times chronicle, for Gore, as depicted here, was never emblematic of the world around him. Yes, we all know that the Senator's son was incubated in a hermetically sealed Washington hotel on Embassy Row. (Think *Eloise Goes to Washington.*) But Gore Jr. did attend Harvard during the which-side-are-you-on sixties, did pull a short stint in Vietnam as a military reporter and did put in time as a politically disenchanted, promising young Nashville journalist in the morning-after seventies, before hearing The Call and entering the family business. Nevertheless, his tale is...his tale, and does not appear to be much more.

This is no criticism of Turque but a comment on Gore. Gore does turn out to be more interesting than might be guessed by the average Leno watcher—not by a helluva lot, perhaps, but some. Turque, naturally, tries to depict him as intriguingly as possible, and on the second page of the book he reminds the reader (perhaps it is more of a plea) that no one—not even the vice-commander-in-stiff—is a "caricature." Turque, though, offers no revelations to blow apart the public Gore persona: that of a wooden, careerist political climber. But let's not blame Turque for failing to unearth evidence that Gore is a boozehound or incest victim: hooray for a public figure who does not appear to have a dark side. Turque's "discovery" is that Al Gore is a paradox: He has, the author notes, both "stood on principle and deferred it to political ambition." He has cultivated a "Dudley Do-Right image" but been a truth-stretching, ruthless attacker when necessary. His record, Turque observes, "reflects the impulses of caution and daring that compete within." In other words, Gore is pretty much like most politicians.

The drama in this account arises from what Turque sees as Gore's lifelong attempt to become his own man. Gore must escape the shadow, first, of his father, Senator Albert Gore of Tennessee, who bucked Southern sentiment in supporting civil rights and opposing the Vietnam War, and then, of Bill Clinton, the champion politicker who's left a hotelful of baggage on his bellhop's cart. Gore's life and career, Turque asserts, have been "punctuated by separations never quite achieved, and by bold strokes never quite converted into personal or political liberation." The burning question: Will Al the perpetual junior, by winning the presidency, finally be fully actualized? Well, all bios need story lines. To his credit, Turque steers clear of melodrama and excessive psychological speculation. After all, his account shows that Gore's life is not loaded with mysteries requiring sophisticated explanations. The Vice President is not a guy who is hard to figure out.

Gore was born in 1948 to a son of a farmer, who had studied law and pulled himself up the political ladder: county superintendent of schools, campaign aide, state labor commissioner, congressman, senator. His mother was the lone woman in the 1936 class of Vanderbilt Law School. And when Al Gore entered the world, his

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dad—then a congressman—lobbied for and received a front-page news story on the birth in the Nashville *Tennessean*, thereby one-upping a political rival whose newborn daughter had warranted merely an inside-the-paper mention. From the beginning, Gore was a political prop. His father was a New Dealer—"Nothing cures poverty like money," he once said—whose liberalism admirably did not stop at black neighborhoods or the nation's border. He was a fiddle-playin' populist *and* a Washington aristocrat at ease in the salons of the capital city. Al Gore would inherit this dichotomy—and the difficulty his father had in shifting between both worlds.

Gore grew up the dutiful son, groomed to be handed his father's franchise. He attended the tony St. Albans school, but life was not all room service. He spent summers working his backside off on the family's tobacco and cattle farm outside Carthage, Tennessee. The caption beneath his portrait in the 1965 *Albanian* yearbook read, "People who have no weaknesses are terrible." (Even then, he was irritating—an ambitious overachiever, like Clinton but without the charm.) Next came Harvard, where Gore was "invisible" during the anti-war "politics of upheaval." A friend from that time recalls, "He always wanted to blend in as one of the guys in a wild period but was never quite all the way there." *Never quite all the way there*—a fitting description of Gore then and now. In the somewhat infamous seminar conducted by Martin Peretz, a left-wing celeb-dissident on campus (now chairman and editor-in-chief of *The New Republic*), Gore avoided voicing provocative positions, while instructor and classmates riffed on Marx, Freud, Tocqueville and the problems of an alienation-ridden industrial society. And yes, Gore did serve as partial inspiration for Oliver Barrett, the protagonist of Erich Segal's weepy *Love Story*. Last year, when he suggested that he and Tipper, then his girlfriend, were the models for the novel's couple, he was only partly wrong. Segal had not used Tipper but he had based Barrett on both Gore and Tommy Lee Jones, Gore's college suitemate. Gore's off-the-cuff reference to *Love Story*, pounced on by the press, was hardly an error of consequence. Yet when you transmit I-have-no-weaknesses vibes, the anti-goody-two-shoes crowd (which is most of us) will tear you apart for the slightest slip-up.

What appears to have been Gore's first tough decision occurred when he was at Harvard: to Vietnam or not to Vietnam? His dad, up for re-election in 1970, was taking tremendous flak for opposing the war. Gore Jr. believed that in Vietnam the United States was propping up a "fascist, totalitarian" regime. But if he ducked service, that could help sink his father, so after graduating in 1969 he volunteered for the Army. There is something a touch noble, or maybe endearing, in what Gore did. It might have required more courage to give the war the finger than to be the good son, but it does seem that he was thinking about someone other than himself. Cynics can dismiss Gore's move as nothing more than an effort to preserve electoral politics as a future employment option. But compare Gore's Vietnam record with Clinton's slippery maneuvers of the time.

As it turned out, Gore's enlistment did not save his father. Senator Gore lost an ugly race in which he was the target of Republican smears and slush money. His son was shipped out to Vietnam two months after the election. (There is some evidence his Army superiors attempted to keep him from harm's way, but no indication that Gore asked for preferential treatment or was aware of any. Does a military commander need to be told what to do with a senator's son? There's even the possibility that Gore's Vietnam orders were delayed by the Nixon Administration so his father's opponent could continue to depict the elder Gore as an unpatriotic elitist.) Albert's defeat left Al Jr. bitter—it also scarred the young man. After watching his father, a public servant of thirty-two years' standing, get booted out of office by an ungrateful public, Gore absorbed a pointed lesson: Be too bold as a politician, and you provide ammunition to the other side. But at the time, the lesson wasn't too relevant. When Gore returned from Vietnam, he wanted no part of politics.

Gore became a reporter at the Nashville *Tennessean*. He also studied at Vanderbilt Divinity School and then Vanderbilt Law School. One of his teachers considered him a "searcher." Another said, "Al Gore had always been a role." That is, Gore did not possess the trait that writer John McPhee attributed to the young Bill Bradley: having "a sense of where you are." Sure, this was the seventies. Who knew where they were going? But Gore did appear to be struggling with a question: Was he indeed the template that life (mainly, his family) had imposed upon him?

In a word, yep. But it took him a few years to yield to destiny. At the newspaper he was a solid beat reporter. He smoked dope once in a while. (The actual amount is in dispute, but who cares?) He was down on politics, yet he still accepted the perks of lineage. He was asked to deliver testimony

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to a Senate subcommittee regarding a story he had covered. (How many local reporters who are not the sons of former senators receive such invitations?) He benefited from a financial deal concocted by his father and industrialist Armand Hammer, which left Gore with the family farm and $200,000 in zinc-leasing fees from Hammer's company. In 1976, when the local Congressional seat opened up, the 27-year-old Gore renounced his renouncement of politics and jumped into the race. "I must be my own man," he told his father, relegating the old man to the back seat of the campaign.

Gore's bid was certainly not his father's campaign. Gore the Elder had eschewed attacks on the other fella and had not shied away from unpopular causes. According to Turque, this was Gore Jr.'s MO: "a relentless work ethic; tactical caution; passionate advocacy of worthy but low-risk issues; and a willingness to revise, or simply muddy up, politically inconvenient positions." Al Gore—the pot-smoking, son-of-a-liberal, longhair reporter—reinvented himself as a conservative. He decried homosexuality as "abnormal" (even though it was not an issue in the race), opposed gun control (telling a pal there was no way he could win if he backed restrictions on guns) and questioned a woman's right to have an abortion. It worked; he won.

In Congress, Gore was a self-proclaimed "raging moderate." He pressed several consumer initiatives and developed a taste for high-tech topics. He had a "good knack for finding issues that were not terribly controversial," said Dan Glickman, a Congressional classmate who is now Secretary of Agriculture. Gore was not a go-to guy on environmental matters. He became chummy with lobbyists. In the early eighties he molded himself into an arms-control expert. While scary Reaganites talked of winnable nuclear wars and a nervous nuclear freeze movement won public support, Gore sought to position himself between the two sides. He advocated replacing multi-warhead missiles with single-warhead missiles. In terms of stabilizing nuclear forces, this was not a bad idea. But Gore, in his smarter-than-thou mode, tried to broker a deal under which the Democratic-controlled House of Representatives would approve President Reagan's request for the controversial (and arguably destabilizing) multi-warhead MX missile; in return, Reagan would build the single-warhead Midgetman missile Gore fancied. In the end, Reagan snookered the Congressman. With Gore's help, the Republicans won several close House votes on the MX; the Midgetman never got off the drawing board. In a similar episode involving health warnings for cigarettes, Gore, again seeking to be a voice-of-reason middleman, was played the fool by Big Tobacco. He was, one staffer said, "the kind of guy you'd like to have sitting across from you at a poker game." A darn-smart fellow who was not as clever as he believed.

*An aide termed Gore '"a New Age pragmatist" with no consistent ideological coloring, capable of landing on Clinton's left or right.'*

In 1984 Gore beat a weak candidate and ascended to the Senate—fourteen years after he had witnessed Tennessee's rejection of his father. According to one old friend, Gore became even *more* serious, calculating and "an expert at hiding his true nature." In his first year as a senator, the biggest impact made in Washington by a Gore was achieved by Tipper, whom he had married in 1970. Her campaign against obscene music lyrics—in which she was joined by other Washington wives—overshadowed any of her husband's initiatives. In one particular silly instance, Tipper's outfit, the Parents Music Resource Center, decried a Twisted Sister song for supposedly celebrating rape and bondage. Actually, a band member told the Senate Commerce Committee (during circuslike hearings that Gore helped orchestrate), the tune had been written about surgery after a band member underwent an operation to remove throat polyps. Afterward, Tipper slowly distanced herself from the cause, reminding anyone who would listen that she played the drums and grooved on the Grateful Dead.

Did Tipper withdraw, or was she shoved by her husband? Less than two years into his Senate term, Gore had begun contemplating a presidential bid. Did he want his wife out front on an issue that pissed off the music industry, the creative community and Hollywood—all sources of Democratic succor and support? In any event, as she turned down the volume, Gore got busy sweet-talking potential funders. In April 1987, days after this pol-in-a-hurry turned 39, he declared he was ready to be President.

The 1988 presidential race was a professional low for the man. He was an awful campaigner. He constantly altered his message: arms-control whiz one day, friend of the workingman the next. In order to collect support in North Carolina, he pulled a nasty flip-flop on an environmental dispute and came to the assistance of Champion International, which was polluting the Pigeon River. He viciously blasted other Democrats vying for the nomination. For instance, one Gore ad said of Dick Gephardt, "As a candidate he'll say or do anything to get elected. What about as President?" Hmm, that's a good question for you-know-who. The only raison d'être for Gore's campaign was that he was a Southern boy who could clean up on Super Tuesday. But Jesse Jackson whipped him there. And then in New York, the rookie hooked up with demagogue Ed Koch, who was obsessed with trash-talking Jackson. As Turque delightfully notes, "Gore began to look less like a President than a well-dressed Jethro Clampett, led around by the nose from borough to borough as Koch pursued his vendetta against Jackson." A desperate Gore also slapped front-runner Michael Dukakis for being soft on crime and introduced into the 1988 campaign the Willie Horton ammo that Vice President George Bush would later deploy against Dukakis with dead-on effectiveness. On primary night in New York, Gore placed third and called Jackson to apologize. His first presidential race was kaput.

Back in the Senate, and chastened, Gore did help to create the Internet—by advocating funding for its predecessor. He gravitated toward environmental issues, and Turque does a fine job of showing how psychological and political impulses merged as Gore remade himself once more, this time into a bold champion who would heal the earth *and* the human spirit. Gore's bestselling book, *Earth in the Balance* (just reissued), was a passionate diagnosis of environmental ills and a compelling call for change. "We must take a bold and unequivocal action; we must make the rescue of the environment the central organizing principle for civilization," Gore proclaimed. He maintained that he was fed up with the tendency of politicians—including himself—to place a finger to the wind and listen to the ever-present murmurs of caution. "The time has long since come to take more political risks," he observed.

But Gore could not heal himself. When he accepted Clinton's invitation to be his running mate, he had to realize he was putting aside the chance to live up to his own words. As Vice President, he could not be a damn-the-polls hero willing to say and do whatever it takes to save Mother Nature. Was this a compromise so he could one day gain control of the ship and steer the course he advocated? Or a sellout for

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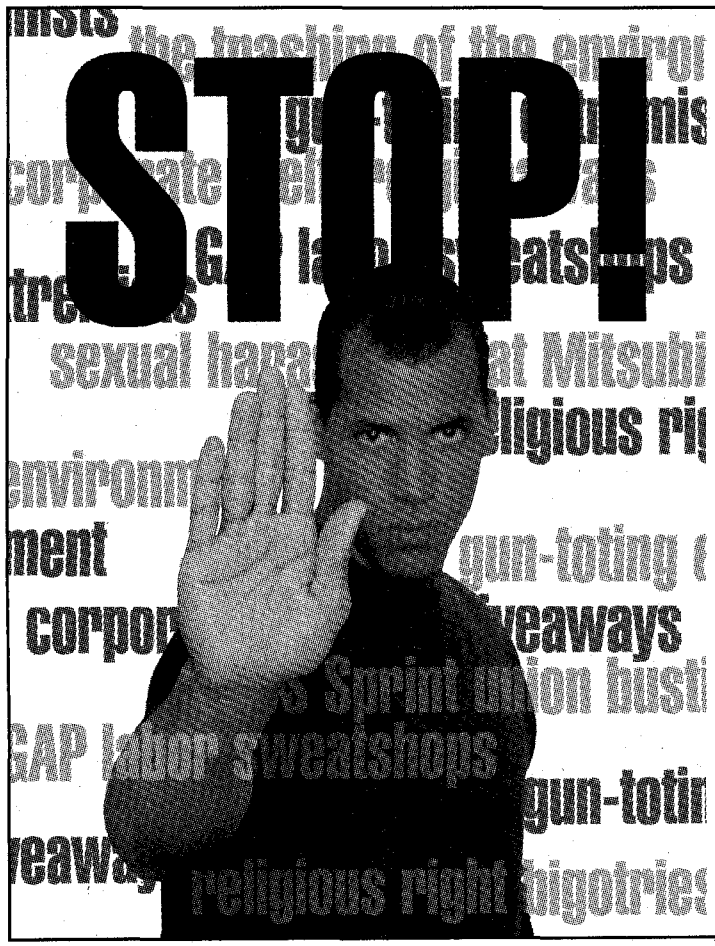
career purposes? Gore did manage to turn this joke of a job into one of importance, becoming a close adviser to Clinton. But it has been difficult to assess Gore's impact on the Clinton presidency. Turque writes: "He was, as one aide put it, 'a New Age pragmatist' with no consistent ideological coloring, capable of landing on Clinton's left or right, depending on the issue."

In the first year Gore eagerly played deficit hawk, willing to forget the campaign promises about funding government investments that put people first. He also pushed for an unorthodox green-friendly energy tax that went down in flames. (Here was that caution and boldness side by side.) In 1995, after Newt Gingrich and his Republican marauders assumed control of Congress, Gore sided with toe-sucking consultant/mercenary Dick Morris in urging Clinton to offer a balanced-budget plan that could compete with Gingrich's proposal. Clinton's more liberal advisers thought this was ceding too much to the Republicans. But when Morris then advised Clinton to cut a budget deal with Gingrich, Gore egged the boss to kick the GOPers in the teeth on what Washington wonks call E2M2—education, the environment, Medicare and Medicaid.

Turque does not unearth any oh-shit revelations about Gore's Veep days. Nor does he illuminate a pattern. Gore pushed Clinton to be daring on gays in the military. Yet after the energy tax flopped, he became timid on environmental policy. "With each passing year of his vice presidency," Turque notes, "Gore's environmental evangelism seemed increasingly to give way to conventional incrementalism." Instead, he devoted more energy to streamlining the federal bureaucracy and hailing the information superhighway. When Clinton was reluctant to make direct fundraising appeals to big donors, Gore reached for the phone, perhaps violating an ancient law prohibiting cup-rattling in federal buildings. He made that now-famous trip to a Buddhist temple in California—then offered contradictory explanations for his involvement in what was an illegal fundraiser. Yet Gore's true offense in campaign fundraising was not these pissant infractions but his enthusiastic collusion in the soft-money scheme adopted by Clinton and Morris (and also utilized by Republicans), which was designed to undermine existing campaign finance law by using large, unrestricted, "soft money" contributions to the party to promote the presidential ticket. Now Gore is running as a campaign finance reform advocate. How many reinventions can one man have? If there were a patent office for politicians, he'd keep it damn busy.

Through the hellish Clinton years, Gore stood by his man. And on the day the House of Representatives voted to impeach the President who had stained an intern's dress (if not the office of the presidency), Gore gathered with Democratic members of the House on the South Lawn of the White House and pronounced, "What happened as a result does a great disservice to a man I believe will be regarded in the history books as one of our greatest Presidents." Yet when it was time to run for the office himself, Gore had trouble calculating just how close he should keep to this greatest of Presidents. His problem was not due only to Clinton's scandalous behavior but to the nature of the vice presidency, which does not allow its holder to shine as an autonomous politician. Gore needed to prove he had his own identity—which, of course, he does.

As Turque's book aptly indicates, there is a decades-long record revealing the man Gore is. He's an odd combination of the perfect schoolboy and a fellow who is not quite comfortable with himself. He's a slash-and-distort, truth-stretching competitor. He's a hyperbolic advocate who throws himself into serious issues but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who is often too quick to compromise or to place his passion on hold. He worries about global warming and the digital divide. He panders when necessary (see Elián). He flip-flops (medical marijuana, yes; then medical marijuana, no). But what does Gore really care about—besides winning elections? That question is hard to answer. A better way of putting it, perhaps, is to inquire, For what would he endanger his career? One could ask the same of most leaders and not receive a reply. Gore's father, though, had an answer: civil rights and ending an unjust war. Against this family yardstick, the son falls short. (Gore's father was not all nobility and public service. After he left office, he eagerly accepted a high-paying job as a lobbyist for Armand Hammer.)

In assessing Gore, Turque nicely sums up the challenge the Veep faces. The "real test" of a leader, he writes, "is his ability to take the citizenry where it is not necessarily willing or able to go on its own. For Gore, that test will be his success in building a domestic and international consensus over the long-term dangers of global warming. He will have to decide, finally, what political risks he is willing to assume in advancing the issue that he says is closest to his core. To do so will require Al Gore's greatest invention—as a leader." Can Gore change his life story from that of a number two to that of a number one? Sure, says Turque. He only has to transform himself into the politician his father was. ■

# McCullers: Canon Fodder?

SARAH SCHULMAN

**ILLUMINATION AND NIGHT GLARE: The Unfinished Autobiography of Carson McCullers.** Edited by Carlos L. Dews. Wisconsin. 280 pp. $24.95.

What makes an American writer? In today's narrow, backlashed literary market the chain of command is quite clear. The "greats" are Updike, Pynchon, Mailer, Bellow and Roth. Now that they are nearing the end of their careers, a new generation of emblematic American writers has been anointed: DeLillo, Banks, perhaps Auster. The up-and-coming greats are also clearly delineated: Moody, Eugenides, Antrim, Foster Wallace.

The rest of us are "special interest." Even Toni Morrison, a Nobel laureate, is as likely to be called "the great African-American writer" as the "great American writer." We are endlessly treated to lists of present and future greats by *The New Yorker* that usually include one black, one East Asian, one South Asian, one closeted lesbian and six white heterosexual males. Then we are blithely told that these people are the future of "American" writing. "American" implying neutral, objective, natural and value-free. In the meantime there are brilliant, invigorated artists relegated to the qualified margins. Caryl Phillips, who I believe is the most exciting writer in the English language, is "Caribbean"; Dale Peck is "gay"; Rebecca Brown is "a lesbian experimentalist"; Carla Harryman is "a Language writer."

It should be clear to anyone who has done time in the world of publishing that there is little relationship between merit and Americanization. A great book may be widely praised, but often not because it is great. Behind-the-scenes matters like wealth, family and MFA programs make a huge difference, and the way an author is cast in the public eye is also hugely important. But even more influential today is the caste of the protagonist in the work. Who an author chooses to inhabit, fictionally, is hugely loaded in today's culture wars and is a primary determinant of the reception of one's work. As powerful as these prejudices are currently, they have a long tradition in the history of canon-building.

Thanks to the diligent work of Carlos Dews, editor of Carson McCullers's final manuscript, *Illumination and Night Glare*, and the University of Wisconsin Press, we are given another opportunity to look at this exceptional fiction writer, and especially what it was about her and her work that created her career and reputation. Her case delineates where literary history puts geniuses whose protagonists are considered "special interest."

Dictated from her sickbed, the autobiographical portion of the manuscript is plainly stated and does not reflect McCullers's mastery of language. It is a fascinating document for one already fascinated, but not a good place to start. However, accompanying the text, Dews has wisely included "The Mute," McCullers's outline for her first novel, *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*, and a collection of letters between Carson and her estranged husband, Reeves McCullers, when he was stationed in Europe during World War II. The hidden treasures and juxtapositions of text reveal the complexities of McCullers's life and work and help us understand the construction of her contested place in the literary canon today.

Lula Carson Smith was born in Columbus, Georgia, in 1917. "By the time I was six," she said, "I was sure that I was born a man." Luckily, her mother treated her like one. The girl had free intellectual rein, she could read or discuss anything, received extensive lessons in classical piano and began writing prodigiously in her early teens. By 16 she had produced two novels and a play, which she brazenly mailed to Eugene O'Neill under her new, more gender-appropriate name, "Carson." Her mother, Marguerite, was convinced that Carson was a genius and organized the family around her development. An heirloom was sold to finance Carson's piano studies at Juilliard, but she used the trip to take writing courses at Columbia and NYU. Returning to the South because of a misdiagnosed illness, later recognized as rheumatic fever, she published her first piece, "Wunderkind," in *Story Magazine* at the age of 19.

Grace Paley has noted that writers choose their themes quite young and often grow old with them. That's why we read so many different kinds of writers. "Wunderkind" is the prototype of McCullers's most common fictive structure. The plot involves a 15-year-old female concert violinist who is studying with a Jewish teacher, Mr. Lafkowitz. As his oddly spelled name implies, Carson had no direct experience of Jews but they were tremendously important to her symbolically. In the story, the girl wonders why the Jewish musicians play with so much feeling while her own performances are thin and disappointing. Of course, in 1936 the Jewish metaphor for pain and its subsequent depth and passion was widely available. But it was here that McCullers began a lifelong investigation of Jews, blacks, the physically disabled and homosexuals as reflections of an overly self-aware adolescent girl stepping out of her own traditional gender role. This paradigm was both her doing and her undoing.

*Sarah Schulman's new play,* Carson McCullers, *will be directed by Craig Lucas at Sundance this summer. Her tenth book,* The Child, *is forthcoming.*

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In fascinating ways it equally placated and violated the caste requirements of a rigid but unaware literary establishment and enabled her content to be accepted as American literature with mitigated and diminishing parameters.

In her next story, this Jew is headed south on a segregated bus, and soon he reappears with the name Singer in *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*. There he is a deaf-mute, living with the man he loves, in a small Southern town where all the other outsiders come to tell him their sorrows. The black Communist doctor, the lonely union organizer, the young tomboy, the sexually confused bar owner—all come to Singer, the man who cannot hear or speak. McCullers published *Heart* in 1940 at the age of 23, to wild acclaim. Professionally, her entitled upbringing and seductive, needy personality helped her exploit every career opportunity. Within two months of publication she had befriended Erika and Klaus Mann and gone to Bread Loaf, where she ingratiated herself with the powerful Louis Untermeyer. Two months after that she left her husband of three years, Reeves McCullers, to move into a collective house in Brooklyn with W.H. Auden, Benjamin Britten, Peter Pears and Richard Wright, and befriended Gypsy Rose Lee. In the fall and winter of that transformative year she did significant work on her next novel, *Reflections in a Golden Eye*, and "The Bride and Her Brother," which would later become *The Member of the Wedding*.

The history of McCullers's literary reception is a very telling one. Those to whom and for whom her literature speaks love her and have remained devoted long after her death in 1967 at the age of 50. But her detractors are just as willing to pigeonhole McCullers and her work. In her lifetime and subsequently, her greatest supporters have been black or openly gay. Tennessee Williams, one of her closest friends, wrote her a fan letter after reading *Heart*. He repeatedly described her as "the greatest living writer of our country." Richard Wright, author of *Black Boy*, reviewed *Heart* in 1940 in *The New Republic*:

> To me, the most impressive aspect of *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* is the astonishing humanity that enables a white writer, for the first time in Southern fiction, to handle Negro characters with as much ease and justice as those of her own race. This cannot be accounted for stylistically or politically; it seems to stem from an attitude towards life which enables Miss McCullers to rise above the pressures of her environment and embrace white and black humanity in one sweep of apprehension and tenderness.

The lesbian novelist and diarist May Sarton wrote in the *Boston Evening Transcript* that one puts this book down "with a feeling of having been nourished by the truth."

On the other hand, dominant culture critics acknowledged her talent but were deliberate in their efforts to keep her in her place. Basil Davenport of *Saturday Review* said that McCullers did not comprehend the "bizarrerie" of her own characters. Clifton Fadiman urged her to find "something to laugh at in the grotesque." George Dangerfield called *The Member of the Wedding* "three really weird people sitting in an even weirder kitchen." He said that her characters were not "quite human" and remind one of faces seen "in a dream perhaps, in a tabloid newspaper possibly or out of a train window." Over and over again, dominant culture critics find her characters "grotesque" or "weird," while black and openly gay critics find her work whole, transforming and great.

*The history of McCullers's literary reception is telling—May Sarton wrote of her as leaving 'a feeling of having been nourished by the truth.'*

In the *New York Times* obituary for McCullers, Eliot Fremont-Smith wrote that she "paved the way for what became the American Southern gothic genre.... [She] was neither prolific nor varying in her theme." Of course, no one is ever criticized in the *New York Times* for the crime of "unvarying themes" when their subject matter is white heterosexual romance. And of course, Southern writers are always considered regional, while Northeastern writers are considered geographically neutral. But "gothic" has always been a code word for "Southern," so why its repetition here? True, few white authors wrote such varied and complex black characters, but is that what the critics point to as "grotesque"? And it's not the Communist or Jewish characters in these forties novels that are "weird."

Physical disability is historically pathologized in literature and often appears as an outward sign of a character's inward immorality. McCullers herself was disabled. She suffered the first of three cerebral strokes at the age of 25 and was paralyzed for much of the last decade of her life. Yet her use of the physically disabled dates from "The Aliens," a story that was written in her teens. Like Gertrude Stein's use of blacks in *Melanctha* as a stand-in for her own Jewishness and homosexuality, McCullers's early use of Jews, and what the critics called "freaks," seems to be more of a projection of her own feelings of singularity than a realist representation.

But what really seems to irk the critics repeatedly are the homosexual tones in many if not most of McCullers's characters. Indeed, most of her creations can be read as homosexual, repressed homosexual, future homosexual or dysfunctionally heterosexual. Albert Erskine (husband of Katherine Anne Porter, whom McCullers essentially stalked when the two women were at Yaddo together) reportedly finished reading *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* and declared, "That woman is a lesbian. I can tell from the author's mind in that novel and by what she makes her characters do and say." And yet there is not a single lesbian moment in the book, unless he counted tomboy Mick Kelly's sexual encounter with a boy named Harry as a coded stand-in. The most overtly homosexual situation in the novel is the mute John Singer's love for his mute friend Antonapoulos. The two share a home together, albeit in separate beds. But even more important, Singer lives for his friend. His love for Antonapolous is the moral center of Singer's life and death. So, is that why the book feels so homosexual? Perhaps it is the absence of the conventional heterosexual narrative of Romance, Marriage, Motherhood. Or perhaps it is the centrality of male and female characters—white, black, young, Communist, disabled—with complex intellectual and emotional lives who never give a thought to heterosexual romance.

Because the homosexual shadings are ever-present but impossible to isolate, *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* passed as "gothic," not as gay. Her second novel, *Reflections in a Golden Eye*, was far more overt and faced an entirely different kind of reception. This novel has two openly gay male characters, a married Army sergeant and a Filipino houseboy. It also involves voyeurism and female sexual mutilation, and though nothing happens that doesn't *really* happen, McCullers's bold honesty cost her a great deal of public approval. In fact, Tennessee Williams felt compelled to defend *Reflections* in his introduction to a later edition, and it remains the only McCullers book currently out of print.

In the thirties, when *Heart* was being written, books with unambiguous and pri-

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mary lesbian content were already well-known. Of course, there was Radclyffe Hall's notorious *The Well of Loneliness*, but also Dorothy Richardson's *Dawn's Left Hand*, Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* and Elizabeth Bowen's *The Hotel*, among many others. Carlos Dews bestows a great gift by including "The Mute" in his edition of *Illumination and Night Glare*, for this outline of *Heart* was previously to be found only in Oliver Evans's compendium *The Ballad of Carson McCullers* (1965).

Here we learn a startling truth about McCullers's volition and choices in her depiction of homosexuality. In "The Mute" McCullers delineates a major character, Lily Mae Jenkins, the only person to appear in the outline who was later cut from the novel. Lily Mae is an "abandoned, waifish Negro homosexual." He is a carnival worker, skilled in music and dancing, and a friend of the novel's other black characters. As Portia, the Kellys' cook, explains to her father, Dr. Copeland, "Lily Mae is right pitiful now. I don't know if you ever noticed any boys like this but he cares for mens instead of girls. When he were younger he used to be real cute. He were all the time dressing up in girls' clothes and laughing. Everybody thought he were real cute then. But now he getting old and he seem different. He all the time hungry and he real pitiful.... He dances for me and I gives him a little dinner." Of course, we cannot know why Carson chose to cut the only overt homosexual in the novel, or why she dared to depict two in *Reflections*. Perhaps it is because, despite the overwhelming homosexual content and sensibility in all of her work, McCullers's own homosexuality held the same imbalance of blatancy and subduction.

McCullers married Reeves at 20, left him at 23 and remarried him after his return from World War II. In the interim he had a love relationship with the composer David Diamond, and the two lived together in Rochester. Reeves, an alcoholic, finally committed suicide in a Paris hotel room in 1953. Aside from her long, fraught, gin-soaked relationship with her husband, Carson never had another serious sexual partner. She fell in love with a number of women and pursued them sexually with great aggression, but seems not to have succeeded in having sex with any of them. Her most documented and extended love obsession was with a wealthy European, Annemarie Clarac-Schwarzenbach, with whom, she reports in her autobiography, she shared one kiss. There is the infamous obsession with Katherine Anne Porter and a much-implied ongoing "friendship" with Gypsy Rose Lee. But if Carson ever actually had sex with a woman, even Tennessee didn't hear of it. According to McCullers's brilliant biographer, Virginia Spencer Carr, Carson did brag to her male cousin that she'd had sex with Gypsy once. But if that was the case, she never mentioned it to any of her gay friends. In the absence of reciprocated lesbian love and the inability to consummate lesbian sex, McCullers still wore a lesbian persona in literature and in life. She clearly wrote against the grain of heterosexual convention, wore men's clothes, was outrageously aggressive in her consistently failed search for sex and love with another woman, and formed primary friendships with other gay people.

In contrast to the condition of the lesbian writer today, who may be out publicly but must closet her content in order to achieve literary neutrality, McCullers was in quite the other boat. Because she yearned to live out her homosexuality but could never find a willing partner, its expression came through her literature. When that expression was coded her books were better received, and when it was less oblique the enthusiasm was diminished. And so her failure in life to connect intimately with another woman was transformed into a charged yet coded literary expression that spoke to many readers who identified as Other. Her work gives us the opportunity to be the moral center of at least one author's vision of an American literature and therefore achieve the elusive neutrality of citizenship. ■

# Flower Power: The Lessons

KIM PHILLIPS-FEIN

**TULIPOMANIA: The Story of the World's Most Coveted Flower and the Extraordinary Passions It Aroused.** By Mike Dash. Crown. 273 pp. $23.

An article in the financial section of the *New York Observer* this spring described a company named NetJ.com Corporation. NetJ.com has no business operations, no revenue and no assets to speak of. To quote its business plan, filed with the Securities and Exchange Commission, "the company is not currently engaged in any substantial business activity and has no plans to engage in any such activity in the foreseeable future." This would seem to render NetJ.com worthless. Yet in February, it was capitalized at $22.9 million.

Despite the Nasdaq's recent gyrations, a market like this one can't help but bring to mind tulipmania, the brief period of fantastic speculation in tulip bulbs in seventeenth-century Holland. Ever since Charles Mackay wrote his 1841 classic, *Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds*, tulipmania has been a potent symbol of the euphoric irrationality of financial speculation. According to Mackay, in the late 1630s a single tulip bulb in the Netherlands might be sold for a price equivalent to that for four oxen. The high point of Mackay's story is the anecdote of a sailor who breakfasted upon what he believed to be an ordinary onion: "Little did he dream that he had been eating a breakfast whose cost might have regaled a whole ship's crew for a twelvemonth."

*Kim Phillips-Fein is a writer living in New York City.*

But Mackay wrote back in those old-fashioned days, when people believed that markets might be speculative, something other than arbiters of perfect truth and rationality. Today, trendy academics like to say that the tulip craze wasn't a bubble at all. In a paper published in 1989, economist Peter Garber argued that the dramatic increase in bulb prices simply reflected the great demand for rare varieties of the bulb. As the flowers multiplied, their price fell. The best-known bubble in history turns out to have been a rational response to fundamentals, after all. (Even Garber, though, was stumped by the twentyfold price increase for common varieties of tulip in the month before the crash; he conceded that this might not have been completely rational—but when you're an economist, it's the model, not the data, that counts.)

Now there's a new history of tulipmania to go with today's sky-high market. *Tulipomania*, by Mike Dash, retells yet again the story of the flower craze, emphasizing the economic context of the bubble and its effects on Dutch society and culture. Perhaps the strangest thing about this book is what it doesn't talk about: Clearly

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it's supposed to provide insight into the stock-market boom of the past decade, yet Dash scrupulously avoids saying anything direct about the Dow Jones, preferring instead to expound upon the finer points of tulip cultivation. Still, it's a colorful description of one of the oddest periods of financial history. And while Dash doesn't comment directly on financial euphoria today—wouldn't want to alarm anyone!—if one reads between the lines, *Tulipomania* offers its own sly commentary on contemporary market fever.

For one thing, Dash attributes the tulip craze to inexperienced investors crowding into the market—not unlike today's day traders. Tulipmania exploded in 1636, during an economic boom in the Netherlands. But despite economic growth, artisans and laborers found themselves barely eking out a decent living, unable to cash in. For these humble sorts, the tulip market offered an irresistible temptation. "Growing bulbs was a lot easier than working an eighty-hour week hammering horseshoes or working a loom," writes Dash. Many of the people growing and selling bulbs were new to the flower business altogether and had little experience in the financial markets. At the same time, speculative financial instruments—like the futures market—were just coming into existence. One can almost hear Alan Greenspan's anxious sigh as Dash describes these novices to the market.

In a sense, Dash uses tulipmania to legitimize "normal" financial activity in the early seventeenth century, much as the recent flick *Boiler Room* told a parable of cheating bucket shops to demonstrate the virtues of real brokerages. Dash suggests that the tulip market was a "rough but intended parody" of the newly built *beurs*—the legitimate Amsterdam stock market. Tulips were more frequently traded in raucous pubs (substitute: chat rooms) than in the calm halls of the *beurs*. Instead of being staffed by experienced bankers or people who understood the complexity of financial markets, the tulip market was dominated by "country people and poor city dwellers who had, when they started dealing in bulbs, almost certainly never owned a single share in their entire lives."

The crash came on the first Tuesday of February, 1637. For no apparent reason, all of a sudden there were no buyers for the bulbs: "The market for tulips simply ceased to exist." Since prices had been rising thanks to simple speculation, they went into a free fall. As Dash puts it, the rout "was far more rapid and complete than history's most notorious financial disaster, the Wall Street Crash of 1929 and the Great Depression that followed it." However, there were few links between the tulip market and the real economy, which was hardly based on mass consumption: No generalized crisis followed the collapse of flower prices.

*Tulipomania* concludes with a few non sequiturs about horticultural history; Dash stubbornly refuses to say anything substantive about finance. (His other implicit analogies don't hold up. Most stock ownership is concentrated in the wealthiest 10 percent of the population. Novice investors and day traders aren't creating the boom; rather, they are riding on its coattails.) But other historians who aren't so allergic to generalization think the episode tells us something important about how financial markets work. For the great economic historian Charles Kindleberger, the tulip bubble serves as a prime example of speculation. Markets, he argues, though generally rational, are not immune to manias, which are by definition irrational. In a bubble, buyers purchase goods simply because they believe their prices will increase. This stokes demand for the goods, hence becoming, at least in the short term, a self-fulfilling prophecy.

However, the moment buyers decide they can no longer risk bidding prices up, they collapse immediately—since the product was only valued as long as people believed its price would rise. Kindleberger believed that an expansion of credit could feed such a speculative frenzy (and thus magnify the effects of a crash)—a useful reminder in times like these, when debt held by financial institutions, corporate debt and good old-fashioned credit-card debt are on the rise, making it seem likely that rising interest rates will call a halt to the party over time.

So how about the trillion-dollar-plus question: Is today's market a bubble? Despite reading stories like NetJ.com's in the paper nearly every week, and the fabulously high valuations of other tech companies that seem to show little prospect of ever turning a profit, it's not so clear. For one thing, thanks to massive stock buybacks—and mergers and acquisitions—corporations are actually returning much more cash to shareholders than they have in the past, over 90 percent of after-tax profits over the 1990s, according to *Left Business Observer* editor Doug Henwood (about double the rate during the Golden Age of the fifties and sixties, when economic growth was distributed far more equally than it is today). It may make

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sense for investors to value their shares more highly. One might ask whether giving so much money back to shareholders is viable over the long term; as my friend who peruses the Flow of Funds like baseball box scores has noted, corporations are supporting this massive transfer of cash to shareholders through heavy borrowing. This can't endure indefinitely.

On a deeper level, the end of the Soviet Union, social democracy in Western Europe and anticolonial movements in the Third World have left capitalism with no political or ideological opposition to speak of. And what the stock market clearly *does* tell us about is the balance of power between labor and capital underlying the economy as a whole. From the standpoint of the very rich, there's plenty to celebrate. After all, the American labor movement was hacked down over the 1980s; the massive skewing upward of income distribution has kept moguls fat and happy. What better cause could there be for euphoria? For this very reason, a few good strikes or a couple months of rising wages may well prove the most effective antidote to market fever. If the balance of power between workers and owners shifts in the real economy, Wall Street will start to seem more dangerous. When the market falls this time—unlike the tulipmania—it's likely to be because of changes in the economy and politics that go well beyond the Dow Jones. ■

FILMS

# Global Screen Rights

STUART KLAWANS

**HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH FILM FESTIVAL**

While browsing my way through the selections in this year's Human Rights Watch International Film Festival—you can browse on your own, June 14–29, if you're in the neighborhood of Lincoln Center's Walter Reade Theater—I found my thoughts slipping back to an era that seems eerily forbidden to us, as if it had been erased from national memory by the rubber-gloved spooks of a Pynchon novel. I speak of the Carter Administration: the only period when America fought the cold war by appealing to "human rights."

The phrase, once uttered, proved predictably embarrassing to the Soviet leadership; but it also undid Carter, who had to button up his cardigan and explain why America's client states were behaving as they are seen to do in some of this festival's programs. In the centerpiece presentation, for example, Marco Bechis's *Garage Olimpo*, we watch a tough-minded picture about state terror in Argentina during the dirty war of the mid-seventies: a drama about a young woman who is disappeared for the crime of teaching slum dwellers to read, and about the remarkably sensitive torturer who thinks she must be his girlfriend, since she can't get away from him.

Or, even better, there's David Blaustein's *Spoils of War*, an unspeakably moving documentary about Argentina's Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo. You meet half a dozen of these women, now elderly, who in the face of state terror found the courage to demand information about their missing family members. You also meet some of the survivors, now in their 20s, who as infants and toddlers saw their parents murdered or trucked away for murder. The grandmothers recall racing up to Carter's Secretary of State, Cyrus Vance, when he visited Buenos Aires, so they could hand him their written testimonies. It was partly because Vance accepted these heartbroken scrawls that we soon got a tougher administration, which could distinguish between "totalitarian" and "authoritarian" regimes and based cold war policy not on "human rights" but good versus evil.

Officially, good triumphed in 1989, the year before the Human Rights Watch festival began. This may have been a good thing for the festival's future programmers, and for the filmmakers whose work they would show. Reaganites had frequently accused the human rights types of being slack in exposing abuses within the Soviet bloc—a criticism that, if true, had now been rendered moot. Communism had withered away, so the festival was at liberty to screen nothing but capitalist crimes. And yet, as I've suggested, the term "human rights" has had both a hard and a soft use: soft in the case of Carter (who sometimes applied it usefully, though with a thick coat of hypocrisy), and hard in the case of those who draw connections between social and economic justice. The Human Rights Watch International Film Festival has certainly been free of hypocrisy; but it has also tended toward a soft, or at least fuzzy, definition of its central term.

Such vagueness comes about, first of all, because of normal programming pressures. When half a dozen curators get together to select some twenty programs, based on whatever is available this year, the world picture that emerges will be less than Cartesian in rigor. But there's also a problem of reticence. Since capitalism is now held to be as natural and universal as fresh air, it routinely goes unnamed, by filmmakers and curators alike. The result: We recognize no pattern that might invite concerted action, but see only disparate cases of torture, exile, censorship and immiseration, which coexist in a kind of democratic pluralism of "human rights abuse."

More complaints on this theme will follow in a moment. For now, though, let me draw your attention to some aspects of this year's program that are brave and useful.

Just in time for the Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon, the festival presents several films about the wreckage left behind. Perhaps the most impressive of these is Mai Masri's 1998 video documentary *Children of Shatila*, here receiving its New York premiere. By focusing on two Palestinian kids—a wonderfully bright 11-year-old girl and an engaging but wounded 12-year-old boy—the picture brings home the meaning of life in a nonplace: a "refugee camp" that has become a permanent settlement, teeming with people who were first exiled, then slaughtered, then written off the political landscape. And yet they still have the nerve not only to exist but to learn, hope and grow up! If *Children of Shatila* is sometimes manipulative, setting up kids to tell its story rather than telling the story through them, there's nevertheless only so much manipulation you can work on reality. What emerges here is stark and overwhelming.

Also of note in the festival's Lebanese subsection: *Harmed Forces* by Irit Gal, a video documentary on Israeli veterans who haven't yet recovered from what they did in Lebanon; and the opening-night feature presentation, the US premiere of Randa Chahal Sabbag's feature *Civilisées* ("A

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Civilized People"), a we're-all-mad-here drama of the civil war, set in and around a checkpoint crossing and featuring exploding cats.

Less useful is the closing-night feature, Jens Meurer's documentary *Public Enemy*, a starry-eyed tribute to the Black Panther Party. Having spent part of my college years peddling *The Black Panther*—an activity for which I will never apologize—I feel a certain rootedness in the period. I can therefore tell you that to make something like *Public Enemy*, you need to be not only ignorant but French-produced.

And then there's the most disappointing work on the program: the rare picture that tries to link economic with social justice and call capitalism by its name.

That picture is *Showdown in Seattle: Five Days That Shook the WTO*, a collaborative piece by half a dozen media collectives. What precisely is the World Trade Organization? What does it do at its meetings? On what dates did it hold its meeting in Seattle? Which groups exactly showed up to protest? Did these people come together spontaneously, or did someone actually organize them? If so, who? When? Where? Why? How? These are the well-known, elementary questions of journalism, and they go unanswered throughout the whole hourlong mishmash.

Camera operators in Seattle had the guts to stand their ground and keep shooting amid plumes of tear gas and advancing police lines. But apparently, no one had enough brains to edit this hard-won footage into an intelligible whole. As a result, *Showdown in Seattle* comes off as a human rights film in the softest sense. It denounces corporate greed, but in ways that are formulaic and uninformative; and it shifts emphasis all too quickly from the damage done by WTO policies to the havoc wrought by Seattle's cops. *They* (whoever they may be) are mean and nasty. *We* are for democracy. That's all you need to know—except, of course, if you have to argue against the WTO's apologists, in which case you're in trouble. The meanies put together a coherent story.

So, to the makers of *Showdown in Seattle*, I say, "Please, try harder. The issues are life-and-death. We need your most passionate work, but also your clearest and most thoughtful." And to the programmers of the Human Rights Watch International Film Festival, I say, "Thank you for the stories that had to be told, and for the effort you've put into bringing them together. You've already done a lot. Please, try harder."

*Screening Schedule*: Krzysztof Kieslowski's *The Decalogue* has attained such an exalted reputation since its debut on the festival circuit, and has grown so legendary in the United States through lack of theatrical bookings, that reviewers now speak of this series in the same tone they'd use for the literary source. The text, of course, is Exodus 20, which Kieslowski and his co-screenwriter, Krzysztof Piesiewicz, interpreted for modern times by making ten hourlong films, each dramatizing the breaking of a commandment.

First shown in 1987 on Polish television, *The Decalogue* takes place mostly in a highrise tenement complex, amid buildings that look like Samuel Beckett characters transformed into stained concrete. Kieslowski said he chose the location because it was "the most beautiful housing project in Warsaw." Here, the lives of sinners both grave and petty intersect, observed by a sometimes grieving, sometimes flabbergasted figure who might be a helpless angel. The range of moods in the films is enormous—from the unendurable brutality of "Thou Shalt Not Kill" to the mad laughter of "Thou Shalt Not Covet Thy Neighbor's Goods"—and the filmmaking is everywhere equal to the occasion, employing an astonishingly full technique without ever calling undue attention to itself.

At last, Facets Multimedia in Chicago has been able to distribute *The Decalogue* as a series of videocassettes, and (even better) New Yorker Films has won the right to release the films theatrically. A limited run is now starting in New York City, with further bookings to follow around the country. Despite what you may have heard, you do not need to approach the theater in a spirit of religious awe. The films are capable of driving you to your knees all on their own. Just go, and keep going. You must see *The Decalogue*. ■


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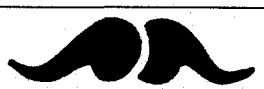

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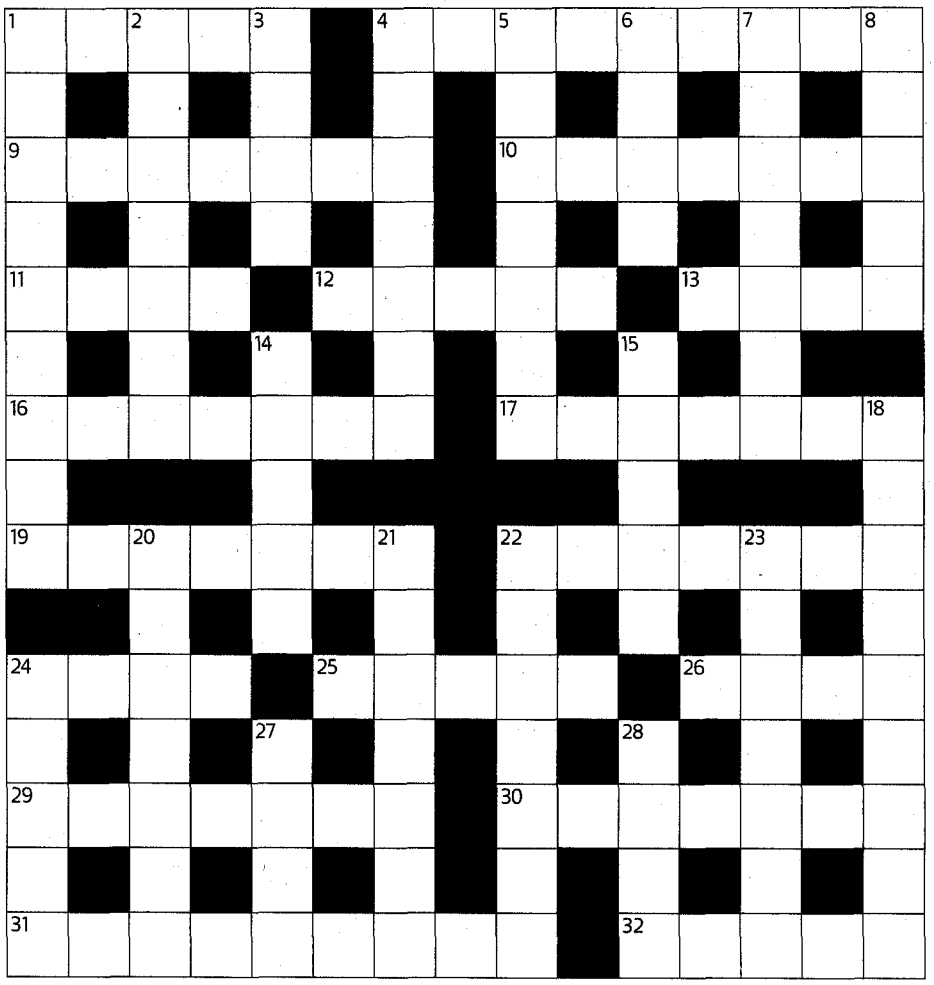

## ACROSS

**1** and **4** They don't usually cover such things as a possible hitch in the royal line, however. (5,9)

**9** Back up the auto—a little company may be getting on with what made the coat for the old college kid. (7)

**10** Snip the feathers of the swan, in fell manner? (3,4)

**11** and **13** Slide showing what one does with the cake, going to a shrewish wife! (3,5)

**12** See 31

**16** Perhaps lies and lies, when untrue statements ducking responsibility. (7)

**17** Does the hunter cry this way, when his game is up? (5-2)

**19** A letter from Athens returned in India in upheaval—it should have been old Algeria! (7)

**22** Cancer—at least a visible sign of it at times. (3,4)

**24, 25** and **26** The way some people fight, making a return to what was torn down in Berlin! (4,2,3,4)

**29** Money mad, possibly, when around the sort of thing associated with triumph! (7)

**30** Describing a country that is scurrying around, one almost hears! (7)

**31** and **12** Don't count on a Christmas dinner after it! (4,5,5)

**32** One is even better than up to par after making it! (5)

## DOWN

**1** Misbehaved, the way one has to be for flight, if injured. (7,2)

**2** The way they made people cry, when suspected of skin disease! (7)

**3** and **14** You old stretches of the desert, you can be counted in large numbers! (9)

**4** Went fast with a number, when the man's heading for places out west! (7)

**5** Is choosy with food, but possibly packs it in here! (5,2)

**6** A mild expletive for a rising Hollywood type! (4)

**7** Marrying out of the tribe, with the former spouse to go up with the little woman, typically. (7)

**8** and **18** What the poor accountant tries to make is required by the funambulist. (5,2,7)

**14** See 3

**15** The things on this page that perplex some people! (5)

**18** See 8

**20** Militant heavenly type who was told to pull for the beach, some years ago, or a claim he made to be so. (7)

**21** A vocation to do this, without getting into trouble, having something to eat. (7)

**22** Sounds like one more puller needed for the open sleigh, but that may be how the cavalier cried. (2,5)

**23** What one may be doing with a book in Pennsylvania. (7)

**24** A place to sleep, though we should get up with it to sprinkle a bit early in the morning. (5)

**27** What kids are said to do with flies found in such a rug? (4)

**28** Possibly lies a little bit in the water. (4)

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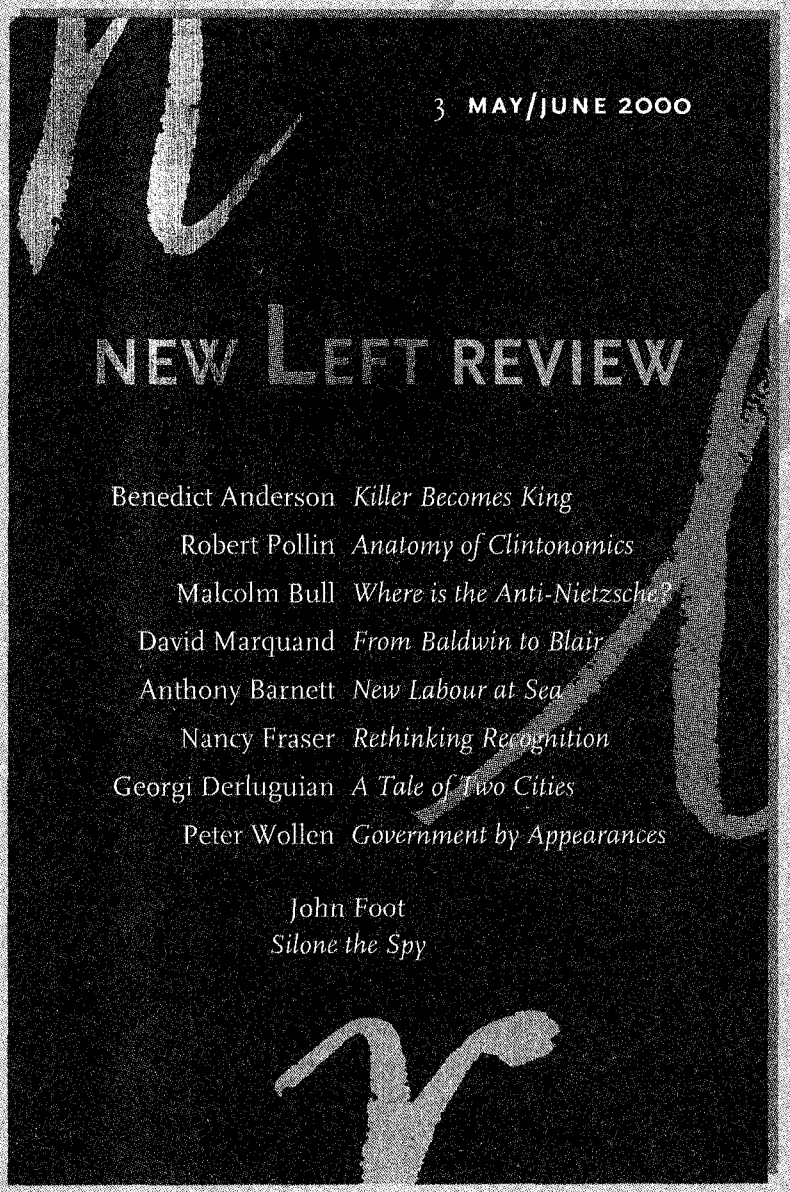
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